

THE UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER

Faculty of Education, Health & Social Care

Barbara Bodichon's *Bildung*: Education, Feminism and Agency in Epistolary
Narratives

Meritxell Simon-Martin

Doctor of Philosophy

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for a postgraduate research degree of the University of Winchester.

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ABSTRACT FOR THESIS

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Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon (1827-1891) was a mid-Victorian English feminist, philanthropist and artist. She is mostly known among women's and gender historians as the charismatic leader of the Langham Place Circle and as an accomplished watercolourist long resident in Algeria. Through analysis of her personal correspondence, this thesis investigates the significance of letters in the development of Bodichon's education – studied here in the sense of *Bildung* (self-cultivation). Reading letter-writing as a *performative* autobiographical act of self-formation, it argues that Bodichon developed her self-cultivation during her lifetime by innumerable daily habits and life choices – a phenomenon not directly accessible to historians. Simultaneously, she projected an epistolary articulation of her *Bildung* through the signifying practice of self-narrating by means of her epistolary "I" – within norms of cultural intelligibility and determined by the features of the epistolary genre. The analysis of Bodichon's epistolary dialogues suggests that letters acted as educational instruments – as sources of *Bildung*. They functioned as forums where she acquired knowledge and exercised her critical thinking; she carved out her identity at the intersection of her feminist, philanthropic and artistic endeavours; and negotiated her autonomy – here understood as her capacity to act in accordance with her evolving self-conception. As such, this thesis claims letters as sources of agency. By reading Bodichon's personal correspondence through the lens of *Bildung*, this study seeks to provide a nuanced portrait of this thoroughly studied historical figure and thus to contribute to Bodichon studies. It proposes a critical examination of the limits of her feminist outlook. In terms of the history of women's education, the use of *Bildung* as a thinking tool enables light to be thrown on informal sources of education especially for women in the context of nineteenth-century Britain. In studying letter-writing as a *performative* autobiographical act, this thesis also seeks to problematise the use of letters in historical investigation and thus to contribute to epistemological debates about the production of historical knowledge.

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No portion of the work referred to in the Thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

I confirm that this Thesis is entirely my own work.

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Meritxell Simon-Martin

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1 Introduction

This thesis examines the significance of letters in the development of Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon's education – studied here in the sense of *Bildung* (self-cultivation). Barbara Bodichon was a mid-nineteenth century English feminist,¹ philanthropist and painter. Her father, Benjamin Smith, was a successful businessman and Liberal Member of Parliament. She was the eldest of five illegitimate children. Her mother died of consumption when Bodichon was seven. Born in 1827 into a liberal Unitarian family, she received an unusually broad education and a progressive upbringing. When she turned 21, her father endowed her with an independent annual allowance that permitted her to pursue her feminist, philanthropic and artistic interests. A positivist persuaded of the unstoppable progress and man's capacity to foster it, she fought for women's rights on paper and in action from an early age. She published her first articles when she was 21 and established, in collaboration with her friend Bessie Rayner Parkes (1829-1925), their own journal in 1858: *The English Woman's Journal*. For three decades she contributed to the launch of the women's movement in England, which fought on different fronts: for married women's property rights, women's education and employment opportunities, and women's voting rights. Her most well-known achievement was the foundation, together with Emily Davies, of the first college for women in England: Girton College (Cambridge University). During her lifetime she was also known as a generous and enthusiastic philanthropist. In the early 1860s she gave time and money to the Female Middle-Class Emigration Society, run by Maria Rye. She established an infant school in London in 1854 (Portman Hall) and a night school for working-class people in Hastings in the late 1870s. Bodichon also built a distinguished career as a painter. She exhibited in England and in the United States, including several solo exhibitions. A lover of nature and outdoor activities, she mainly painted watercolour landscapes – inspired by the places she lived in and visited. For Bodichon led a rather nomadic lifestyle. From an early age, her father took Bodichon and her siblings on day excursions and holiday trips by train, boat or in their luxurious eight-passenger carriage. During her teenage years she went on painting expeditions with a view to improving her drawing and colouring

¹ I discuss the use of the terms 'feminist' and 'feminism' at the end of this chapter.

techniques. Later in life her sketching tours regularly took her to Wales, Cornwall, and the Isle of Wight. Following Victorian fashion she frequented resorts for convalescence. She also travelled around Britain and abroad to visit friends and relatives or simply for the sake of sightseeing and getting to know other cultures. At the age of 30 she married a French doctor settled in Algiers and the couple lived six months in England (in summer) and six months in Algeria (in winter). In her home country, she divided her time between her different interests: the woman question, philanthropy and painting. In Algeria she primarily developed her artistic activities, though she never fully disconnected from her other social endeavours. For their honeymoon the Bodichons embarked on an eight-month trip across today's United States and Canada. Sketching tours, convalescence stays, sightseeing trips, and visiting friends and relatives formed an integral part of her active leisured lifestyle, including after the series of strokes she suffered, aged 50 onwards.

This thesis examines the significance of letters in the development of Bodichon's *Bildung* – as sources of agency – as a way of providing a nuanced portrait of Bodichon, exploring informal sources of learning, and problematizing the use of letters as historical evidence. In chapter 2, I discuss the relevant literature related to Bodichon studies and I outline my study of Bodichon's epistolary *Bildung*. I argue that scholarship tends to focus on Bodichon's feminist, philanthropist and artistic 'achievements'. In dialogue with this scholarship, my study seeks to provide a new perspective that draws attention to the limits of her feminist outlook. In chapter 3, I survey the literature on the history of women's education in England in the nineteenth century and I outline the theoretical framework that structures my reading of Bodichon's epistolary self-cultivation. I argue that the general focus of the existing literature is placed on the study of women's opportunities for schooling and examinations and that reading Bodichon's letters through the lens of *Bildung* sheds light on informal sources of education. In this chapter I argue that *Bildung* is a 'problematic' thinking tool and I put forward the revised understanding of *Bildung* I explore in this thesis around three axes: autonomy, power and harmonious self.

In chapter 4, I discuss the methodological approach that underpins my study of Bodichon in dialogue with the theoretical debates that have characterised feminist historiography. I explore a cross-epistemological perspective on feminist history via a revised understanding of letters as historical

evidence and a threefold combination of epistolary analysis. I first put forward my *performative*² reading of letter-writing as an autobiographical act constitutive of the self and I draw attention to letters *sent to* and *about* Bodichon as valuable sources of historical knowledge. Next I outline how I select letter excerpts and analyse epistolary narratives following a combination of three methods: content, discourse and interpretative analysis. Ultimately, I argue that my *performative* conceptualization of letters and my combined epistolary analysis seek to contribute to epistemological debates about the production of historical knowledge.

I develop my examination of Bodichon's epistolary *Bildung* in the second part of my thesis, which I structure in three central chapters. These correspond to three dimensions of *Bildung* I highlight, namely knowledge acquisition and critical thinking, identity, and autonomy. In chapter 5, I put forward the first dimension of my understanding of epistolary education. In this chapter I explore the *Bildung*-like elements of Bodichon's educational experience and I discuss the role of letters in Bodichon's knowledge acquisition and critical thinking. I examine how the practice of reading and engaging in other informal activities (such as participating in literary and political salons and embarking on sketching tours) triggered epistolary conversations between Bodichon and her friends where they shared knowledge, exercised their reasoning skills confidently and thus, developed their outlooks dialogically and forged their subjectivity – which, in line with *Bildung*, involved a critical engagement with normativity.

In chapter 6, I discuss the role of travelling and the act of writing travel letters in Bodichon's formation of her identity as a female traveller at the intersection of her feminist, philanthropic, and artistic interests. In *Bildung*'s terms, I examine the significance of travelling and epistolary travel writing as concerns Bodichon's individuality as carved out by way of self-alienation – the process in which individuals are exposed to the unknown, adopt an open attitude towards new perspectives, and incorporate them into their sense of self. Extrapolating Frédéric Regard's and Kristi Siegel's suggestion that the identity of the colonizing subject is redefined as a result of the encounter with the Other, in this chapter I examine how Bodichon's nomadic lifestyle acted as one means through which she undertook her self-alienation and articulated this

² Butler, J. (1990) *Gender Trouble* (New York and London: Routledge).

transformation in her travel writing determined by the epistolary “you”.³ In this chapter I also explore how, in the process of self-alienation and in line with *Bildung*’s requirement to engage critically with the world, Bodichon mobilized – adopted, redefined and challenged – dominant discourses, including sanctioned modes of female travelling. I also unpack the prejudices that Bodichon left unchallenged in her occasional ‘partial’ self-alienation.

In chapter 7, I discuss the last dimension of *Bildung* I highlight in this thesis: personal autonomy. Drawing on Diana Meyers’ conceptualization of autonomy, I explore the significance of letters in Bodichon’s struggle for self-determination: her striving to act in ways that conformed to her evolving sense of self.⁴ I look at how the autobiographical “I” in her epistolary narratives acts as the locus of a critical engagement with a matrix of discourses and how, in the process of fashioning her self-images, Bodichon worked out her autonomy determined by the distinct features of the genre of letter-writing. In this chapter I also tease out how Bodichon projected an articulation of her action as a self-determining agent at the expense of certain social categories. Resonating with the intersubjective, reciprocal and socially interactive nature of *Bildung*, in this thesis I suggest that Bodichon’s female correspondents also developed an epistolary self-cultivation. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 briefly examine most notably her friend Bessie Parkes’ epistolary *Bildung*.

In chapter 8, I draw together the threads of Bodichon’s epistolary *Bildung*. I discuss how *Bildung* permits offering a nuanced portrait of Bodichon, exploring letters as sources of informal education, and contributing to epistemological debates about the production of historical knowledge. I first make an assessment of Bodichon’s self-cultivation. I outline the gendered nature of her *Bildung* and its significance in terms of her lifestyle and public commitment. I trace the reverberations of *Bildung*’s tension between individuality and normativity in her epistolary self-cultivation. I also discuss the nature of the portrait of Bodichon that can be offered by dint of her personal correspondence. Contrasting *Bildung*’s and *performative*’s antagonistic conceptualizations of subjectivity, I discuss the

³ Regard, F. (ed.) (2009) *British Narratives of Exploration. Case Studies of the Self and Other* (London: Pickering and Chatto) p.4; Siegel, K. (2004) ‘Intersections: Women’s Travel and Theory’, in Siegel, K. (ed.) *Gender, Genre, and Identity in Women’s Travel Writing* (New York: Peter Lang) p.7.

⁴ Meyers, D.T. (1989) *Self, Society and Personal Choice* (New York and Oxford: Columbia University Press).

historical knowledge that emerges from Bodichon's epistolary narratives. Moving away from *Bildung's* notion of a complete and harmonious self, I suggest that ultimately, Bodichon's 'self' is not easily identified by means of her letter-exchanges. I also argue that the knowledge that can be gathered through Bodichon's personal correspondence provides a partial yet insightful understanding of her agentic becoming. I conclude this chapter and this thesis by discussing my *performative* reading of Bodichon's letters as sources of *Bildung* – its significance and possible further lines of inquiry.

The terms feminism and feminist, derived from the French *féminisme*, were not coined in the English language (at least in Britain) until the 1890s, when Bodichon was already dead.⁵ The terms used by nineteenth-century pioneers were 'woman's rights woman' to refer to themselves and 'the (woman's) movement', 'the cause' or 'the woman question' to refer to their campaigns. Despite the apparent anachronism, following Kathryn Gleadle, I will use the terms 'feminist' and 'feminism' in the present work in acknowledgement of the common ground shared between the mid-nineteenth-century terms and today's: an awareness of women's subordinated position in society and an activist aim to redress these discriminations.⁶ 'Feminist' and 'feminism' in this study describe women who, by the mid-nineteenth century, claimed their right to a wider scope of action than society and custom gave them. The nature of this revised place of women in society varied considerably. But, within this heterogeneity of approaches, mid-Victorian 'feminists' like Bodichon and her friends shared a strong awareness of women's unequal relationship vis-à-vis men and a desire to improve their condition in society.⁷

⁵ Rendall, J. (1985) *The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France and the United States, 1780-1860* (Basingstoke: Macmillan) p.1; Evans, R.J. (1977) *The Feminists* (London: Croom Helm) p.39 note 1.

⁶ Gleadle, K. (1995) *The Early Feminists. Radical Unitarians and the Emergence of the Women's Movement, 1831-1851* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan) p.5.

⁷ This thesis was presented at the conference 'Un/disciplined? Research Methods, Theories and Standpoints of Women's and Gender History', Vienna, 27-29 February 2012. It has been submitted to the Austrian journal *L'HOMME. Europaeische Zeitschrift fuer Feministische Geschichtswissenschaft* (European Journal for Feminist History). It is currently under review. See also Simon-Martin, M. (2012) 'La correspondance de Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon (1827-1891): l'*agency* conceptualisée à travers les échanges épistolaires', in Montenach, A. and Lambert, K. (eds) 'Agency: un concept opératoire dans les études de genre', *Rives Méditerranéennes*, Volume 41.

2 Bodichon Studies: Literature Review

Introduction

In this chapter I provide a survey of the literature relevant to my study of Barbara Bodichon. Most notably I review the works by Hester Burton, Jacquie Matthews, Sheila Herstein, Pam Hirsch, Barbara Caine, Pauline Nestor and Deborah Cherry. In section 2.1. I argue that, overall, Bodichon studies tend to focus on the ‘successes’ in Bodichon’s life, in terms of her feminist campaigns, her philanthropic endeavours, and artistic career. Most notably, scholarship assesses Bodichon’s feminist campaigning as comprehensive and her feminist approach as more progressive than that of her colleagues. With the notable exception of Caine, biographers highlight the significance of Bodichon as a feminist theorist and as the leading initiator, (intermittent) organizer, and catalyst of the mid-Victorian women’s movement. In dialogue with this scholarship, in section 2.2. I provide an outline of the epistolary study of Bodichon’s *Bildung* I explore in this thesis. I discuss how Nestor and Cherry each develop methodologically innovative studies that provide a nuanced portrait of Bodichon. In line with the work by these two scholars, in this section I introduce the alternative approach to Bodichon that I propose. It consists of reading Bodichon’s personal correspondence through the lens of *Bildung* and seeks to provide a critical revision of Bodichon that draws attention to the limits of the feminist stance that fuelled her lifestyle.

2.1 Bodichon in the Existing Literature

Bodichon is a well-known figure among western women’s and gender historians. She has been the object of three biographies, which assess her feminist and philanthropic involvement and her artistic career.¹ Her feminist approach and

¹ Burton, H. (1949) *Barbara Bodichon, 1827-1891* (London: J. Murray); Worzala, D.M.C. (1982) ‘The Langham Place Circle: The Beginnings of the Organised Women’s Movement in England, 1854-1870’, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison; Herstein, S. (1985) *A Mid-Victorian Feminist, Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press); Hirsch, P. (1998) *Barbara Bodichon: Feminist, Artist and Rebel* (London: Chatto and Windus).

activism have also been explored in several articles and book chapters;² her writings have been reprinted in anthologies;³ and some of her letters have been edited.⁴ She is mentioned systematically in general accounts of the history of the women's movement in England and in studies of specific feminist campaigns.⁵ Her artistic activities have also been largely explored⁶ and are discussed in general

² Bradbrook, M.C. (1975) *Barbara Bodichon, George Eliot and the Limits of Feminism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press); Nestor, P.A. (1982) 'A New Departure in Women's Publishing: The *English Woman's Journal* and the *Victoria Magazine*', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 15 (3) pp.93-106; Matthews, J. (1983) 'Barbara Bodichon: Integrity in Diversity', in Spender, D. (ed.) *Feminist Theorists. Three Centuries of Key Women Thinkers* (London: The Women's Press); Rendall, J. (1987) '"A Moral Engine?" Feminism, Liberalism and *The English Woman's Journal*', in Rendall, J. (ed.) *Equal or Different: Women's Politics, 1800-1914* (Oxford: Blackwell); Rendall, J. (1989) 'Friendship and Politics: Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon (1827-1891) and Bessie Rayner Parkes (1829-1925)', in Mendus, S. and Rendall, J. (eds) *Sexuality and Subordination: Interdisciplinary Studies of Gender in the Nineteenth Century* (London and New York: Routledge); Herstein, S. (1993) 'The Langham Place Circle and Feminist Periodicals of the 1860s', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 26 (1) pp.24-27; Hirsch, P. (2000) 'Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon: Feminist Leader and Founder of the First University College for Women', in Hilton, M. and Hirsch, P. (eds) *Practical Visionaries: Women, Education and Social Process, 1790-1930* (New York: Longman).

³ Most notably Lacey, C.A. (1987) *Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon and the Langham Place Group* (New York and London: Routledge and Kegan Paul).

⁴ Cross, J.W. (ed.) (1884) *George's Eliot's Life as Related in her Letters and Journals* (London: Harper and Brothers); Erskine, S. (ed.) (1915) *Anna Jameson: Letters and Friendships, 1812-1860* (London: T. Fisher Unwin); Buchanan, B.I. (ed.) (1923) *Buchanan Family Records: James Buchanan and his Descendants* (Capetown: Townshend, Taylor and Snashall); Sharp, E. (1924) *Hertha Ayrton. A Memoir* (London: E. Arnold and Co); Malleson, H. (1926) *Elizabeth Malleson 1828-1916: Autobiographical Notes* ([S.I.]: printed for private circulation); Haight, G.S. (ed.) (1940) *George Eliot and John Chapman: With Chapman's Diaries* (New Haven: Yale University Press); Haight, G.S. (ed.) (1954-1978) *The George Eliot Letters* (New Haven: Yale University Press); Doughty, O. and Whal, J.R. (eds) (1965-1967) *Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (Oxford: Clarendon Press); Reed, J.W. (ed.) (1972) *An American Diary 1857-1858* (London: Routledge and K. Paul); Allingham, H. and Williams, E.B. (eds) (1911) *Letters to William Allingham* (London: Longmans, Green and Co.); Haight, G.S. (ed.) (1985) *Selections from George Eliot's Letters* (New Haven: Yale University Press); Murphy, A.B. and Raftery, D. (eds) (2004) *Emily Davies. Collected Letters, 1861-1875* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press).

⁵ Blackburn, H. (1902) *Women's Suffrage: A Record of the Women's Suffrage Movement* (London: Williams and Norgate); Strachey, R. (1928) *The Cause. A Short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britain* (London: G. Bell and Sons); Stewart, W.A.C. and McCann, W.P. (1967) *The Educational Innovators, 1750-1880* (London: Macmillan); Bridenthal, R. and Koonz, C. (eds) (1977) *Becoming Visible: Women in European History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co.); Holcombe, L. (1983) *Wives and Property: Reform of the Married Women's Property Law in Nineteenth Century England* (Oxford: Martin Robertson); Rendall, J. (1985) *The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France and the United States, 1780-1860* (Basingstoke: Macmillan); Banks, O. (1986) *Becoming a Feminist: The Social Origins of 'First Wave' Feminism* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf); Shanley, M.L. (1989) *Feminism, Marriage and the Law in Victorian England, 1850-1895* (Princeton: Princeton University Press); Levine, P. (1994) *Victorian Feminism, 1850-1900* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida); Holton, S.S. (1996) *Suffrage Days. Stories from the Women's Suffrage Movement* (New York: Routledge); Caine, B. (1997) *English Feminism, 1780-1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press); Anderson, B.S. (2000) *Joyous Greetings. The First International Women's Movement, 1830-1860* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

⁶ Crabbe, J. (1981) 'An Artist Divided: The Forgotten Talent of Barbara Bodichon, a Very Remarkable Victorian', *Apollo*, 113, May, p.231; Gandy, F., Perry, K. and Sparks, P. (eds) (1991) *Barbara Bodichon, 1827-1891* (Cambridge: Centenary Exhibition Catalogue); Hirsch, P. (1995) 'Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, Artist and Activist', in Campbell, C. (ed.) *Women in the Victorian Art World* (Manchester: Manchester University Press).

studies of nineteenth-century female art.⁷ She is found in (feminist) biographical dictionary entries⁸ and her life and work have reached a more general readership.⁹ As this section will show, the bulk of this rich body of scholarship tends to focus on exploring Bodichon's 'achievements'.

According to her biographers, Bodichon was a 'golden-haired' woman of 'sunlit',¹⁰ 'flashing' beauty¹¹ and 'titianesque appearance'.¹² Hester Burton portrays her as a self-forgetful¹³ and impetuous¹⁴ woman with a mind 'at once original, generous and gay';¹⁵ a woman full of 'large sympathies' but whose 'waywardness' and 'reckless indifference to public opinion'¹⁶ 'profoundly shocked' many Victorians and earned her 'a reputation for oddity'.¹⁷ For Sheila Herstein, Bodichon was 'an eccentric', and 'Her dress, lifestyle, and impatience with social niceties encouraged public criticism'.¹⁸ She was 'By nature impulsive'¹⁹ and had an 'absolute contempt for convention'.²⁰ She 'silenced any opposition with an indelicate "bosh!" and drove off visitors, if she found them inconvenient, with "Devastators of the day, away, away!"'.²¹ Pam Hirsch teases out this understanding of Bodichon by emphasising Bodichon's generous, cheerful, enthusiastic and compromising nature.

Based on an analysis of her personal correspondence and her publications, scholars agree that Bodichon's feminist outlook was cohesively 'comprehensive and eclectic'. She regarded educational, economic, legal and political disabilities

⁷ Marsh, J. and Gerrish Nunn, P. (1989) *Pre-Raphaelite Women Artists* (London: Virago).

⁸ Spender, D. (1982) *Women of Ideas and What Men Have Done to Them: From Aphra Behn to Adrienne Rich* (London: Ark Paperbacks); Banks, O. (1985) *The Biographical Dictionary of British Feminists* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf); Crawford, E. (2001) *The Women's Suffrage Movement. A Reference Guide, 1866-1928* (New York: Routledge); Wayne, T. (ed.) (2011) *The Landmarks of Feminism* (Westport: Greenwood Press). Bodichon also has an entry in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.

⁹ Woitczak, H. (2002) *Notable Women of Victorian Hastings: A Collection of Mini-Biographies* (Hastings: Hastings Press); Ridd, J. (2008) *A Destiny Defined. Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddall in Hastings* (Pett: Edgerton Publishing Services).

¹⁰ Herstein, S. (1985) p.105.

¹¹ Hirsch, P. (1998) p.ix.

¹² Herstein, S. (1985) p.101.

¹³ Burton, H. (1949) p.138.

¹⁴ Ibid, p.169.

¹⁵ Ibid, p.xi.

¹⁶ Ibid, p.138.

¹⁷ Ibid, p.1.

¹⁸ Herstein, S. (1985) p.192.

¹⁹ Ibid, p.157.

²⁰ Ibid, p.104.

²¹ Ibid, pp.16-17, quoting from Bradbrook, M.C. (1975) p.4.

as the interconnected causes of female unequal position in society.²² Her feminist approach was also more progressive than that of her co-workers. For Burton, Bodichon was born 'a hundred years too soon'.²³ As Barbara Caine summarizes:

Where they sought reform of the laws pertaining to married women, [Barbara Leigh] Smith [Bodichon] went further, demanding also an autonomous sphere of action to enable married women to pursue their own interests and activities. Where they sought to expand the range of paid jobs available to unmarried women, but hesitated about paid work for married women, she insisted that women's need for work was exactly the same as men's – and that almost all professions and occupations should be open to them. When they were cautious and hesitant about advocating the need for women's suffrage, she was in no doubt about the need to campaign for it as publicly as possible.²⁴

Bodichon's reforming zeal 'was in her blood'.²⁵ She inherited her 'instinct for advanced and unpopular ideas' from her family, who 'propounded theories a generation before they were accepted by anyone else'.²⁶ Both her father, Benjamin Smith, and grandfather, William Smith, were Liberal politicians who fought for religious and civil rights in Parliament. Benjamin Smith influenced Bodichon 'to think "politically" rather than to think "charitably", at a time when most well-to-do women were willing to be called philanthropists, but usually unwilling to engage in anything approaching the political process'. Instead, Bodichon 'regarded anyone who ignored political affairs as an "idiot", in the sense derived from the Greek origin of the word, meaning a person who fails to assume the responsibilities of a citizen'.²⁷ Other female figures, most notably her aunt Julia Smith and writers Anna Jameson and Mary Howitt, introduced the young Bodichon 'to specifically female modes of participation in political events'.²⁸ Smith, Jameson and Howitt got involved in the abolitionist and free trade movements in the 1830s and 1840s and brought Bodichon along. In 1845 Julia Smith took her niece to the Theatre Royal bazaar (London), a fund-raising activity organized by the ladies' committee of the Anti-Corn Law League. Bodichon

²² Matthews, J. (1983) p.100.

²³ Burton, H. (1949) p.95. Burton's opinion is shared by Barbara Stephen, for whom she was 'born two generations too soon', Stephen, B. (1927) *Emily Davies and Girton College* (London: Constable) p.4.

²⁴ Caine, B. (1997) pp.99-100.

²⁵ Burton, H. (1949) p.29.

²⁶ Ibid, p.2.

²⁷ Hirsch, P. (1998) pp.84-85.

²⁸ Ibid, p.27.

learned from them how women carved out their right to have a voice in legislation by running committees, raising funds and petitioning Parliament.²⁹ As Hirsch writes, 'from an early age then, the seeds of a feminist political education were being sown'.³⁰ In her view, it was precisely Bodichon's 'unusual political education and acumen that enabled her to assume the leadership role of the Langham Place group³¹ – the inspiration and focal point of feminist agitation in England for thirty years'.³²

Similarly determinant were Bodichon's unique broad education and liberal upbringing at the heart of a family environment where 'the air was filled with advanced ideas, strange new philosophies and breath-taking gusts of freedom'.³³ For Herstein, 'The household was irregular from the point of view of strict Victorian standards of education and social convention'.³⁴ Bodichon's home instruction largely consisted of free access to knowledge in the form of reading and discussing her impressions with like-minded friends. She read 'widely in materials quite different from the novels or religious tracts considered appropriate fare for the average Victorian daughter' at a time when few girls were actively encouraged to read widely and to express their opinions privately and in print.³⁵ Herstein calls it 'desultory reading',³⁶ but Hirsch underlines its positive ultimate implications in terms of activism: 'Everything that she read inspired Barbara to commit herself to action',³⁷ which in turn proved that 'the apparently private activity of women reading at home had potential social implications' – a

²⁹ Hirsch, P. (1998) pp.25-30.

³⁰ Ibid, p.30. For further information on the women's movement in England in the early nineteenth century and the significance of Unitarianism on its development see Gleadle, K. (1995).

³¹ Bodichon and her friend Bessie Rayner Parkes founded *The English Woman's Journal* in 1858. Their aim was to provide a space for the discussion and diffusion of their feminist activities. With the help of new participants such as Maria Rye, Jessie Boucheret, and Emily Faithfull they soon expanded their pursuits. Boucheret set up the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women and held classes in arithmetic and bookkeeping. Rye established an office for the copying of legal documents and Faithfull the Victoria Press, which trained women compositors. Initially, they set their offices in Cavendish Square but the expansion of their endeavours made them move to 19 Langham Place soon after. The new offices provided not only the place from where all these activities were run but also a space for a ladies' club, which included a library, a dining room, and a coffee shop. The location of these offices gave the women working there the name of the Langham Place Ladies and the Langham Place Circle, Caine, B. (1997) pp.94-97.

³² Hirsch, P. (1998) p.vii.

³³ Burton, H. (1949) pp.37-38.

³⁴ Herstein, S. (1985) p.10.

³⁵ Ibid, p.17.

³⁶ Ibid, p.11.

³⁷ Hirsch, P. (1998) p.38.

question I discuss in Section 3.3.³⁸ According to Hirsch, 'Barbara's apprenticeship years were ... strongly influenced by her father's constant desire to give his children both pleasure and education in its broadest sense'.³⁹ He took them to regular educative travels at home and abroad and exposed them to the social and political gatherings he organized in his houses in London and Hastings. Bodichon's upbringing, 'unheard of in strict Victorian family circles',⁴⁰ was also characterized by great freedom of action. She was allowed to take an unchaperoned trip around Europe, aged 23, with her friend Bessie Parkes. Two years earlier, her father had endowed her with an annual allowance and the authorization to spend it as she thought it best, an unusual gesture at the time.

Hirsch argues that 'Barbara's rather bohemian home, although it occasionally gave rise to difficulties in polite society, also meant that she was unusually free to pursue her studies'.⁴¹ Bodichon gained knowledge unconstrained via extensive reading. Moreover, particularly interested in painting, she received lessons from masters like William Holman Hunt, Cornelius Varley and William Collingwood Smith and attended drawing classes with Francis Cary in Bedford College for a year. Bodichon 'had the great fortune to grow up in a family which was both knowledgeable about art and also owned a remarkable collection of original paintings'. William Smith commissioned the education of several artists and was an amateur collector of works of arts. His son inherited his love for art and encouraged Bodichon to train with the best masters available. Bodichon's lifestyle provided her with 'endless opportunities for looking, exploring and drawing on family outings'.⁴² Because of her travelling, she had the chance to paint 'a very wide range of topography – the Sussex countryside, the Isle of Wight, Cornwall, Wales, the Lake District, Scotland, Ireland, France, Spain, Germany, America and Africa'.⁴³

Another factor that stimulated Bodichon's reformist zeal according to her biographers is her Unitarian background – a question I discuss throughout this thesis. In the nineteenth century Unitarianism was a politicized religious sect. Its

³⁸ Hirsch, P. (1998) p.36, referring to Flint, K. (1995) *The Woman Reader, 1837-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).

³⁹ Ibid, p.46.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p.14.

⁴¹ Ibid, p.40.

⁴² Hirsch, P. (1995) p.170.

⁴³ Ibid, p.171.

followers rejected the doctrines of predestination and eternal damnation in favour of the positive belief in human's ability, with the help of religion, to exercise free will in constructive ways. In their view, rational thought and science were compatible with faith in God. Following the Unitarian tenet that no religion can claim an absolute monopoly on theological truth, in William Smith's household 'the family attended church services regularly and were encouraged to hear a noted preacher, whatever his theological views'. According to Herstein, Smith's 'religious convictions shaped his political and social attitudes and created within his family circle a sense of public obligation and openness toward ideas and individuals, which was the most important heritage passed on to his children and grandchildren'.⁴⁴ Hirsch adds that it was Bodichon's Unitarian background which 'taught her to consider wealth as carrying with it social responsibilities'.⁴⁵

Unitarians' endorsement of the philosophy of the Enlightenment made them a potential ally to feminism: its credo of the rights of man and the power of a rational mind could be extended to women. Accordingly, scholars have attributed Bodichon's superior education to having been brought up within Unitarianism. In the words of Hirsch, Unitarians' 'desire for women to be respected as rational creatures inclined them towards the drive for more rational education for girls'.⁴⁶ Unitarians also tended to endorse the belief in the necessity to improve the condition of women in society. From the late eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth, they provided emotional, logistical and financial support to feminists. Like her friends Parkes and the sisters Florence and Rosamund Davenport-Hill, Bodichon was surrounded and supported by 'a community of fellow-Unitarians which if small in number was both intelligent and influential'.⁴⁷

'But there was a shadowed side to Barbara's life', writes Hirsch.⁴⁸ Bodichon was an illegitimate child. Benjamin Smith did not marry the mother of his children, Anne Longden.⁴⁹ Biographers have hypothesized about the impact of illegitimacy on Bodichon's reformist and feminist zeal. Jacquie Matthews is persuaded that

⁴⁴ Herstein, S. (1985) pp.9-10.

⁴⁵ Hirsch, P. (1995) p.177.

⁴⁶ Hirsch, P. (1998) p.29.

⁴⁷ Burton, H. (1949) p.36.

⁴⁸ Hirsch, P. (1998) p.vii.

⁴⁹ Matthews suggests that Benjamin Smith did not marry in order to relinquish patriarchal authority, Matthews, J. (1983) p.93.

‘The conflict for Barbara must have been great – how to reconcile the love and admiration for her generous radical father with the memory of the “poor little mother” and the laws which crush women’. In her view, she ‘found that reconciliation in her feminism’.⁵⁰ Herstein also agrees that coming to terms with their illegitimacy must have caused the Leigh Smith children ‘much inner turmoil, despite their great love and obvious respect for their father’.⁵¹ Herstein finds it difficult to assess the impact of illegitimacy ‘since they avoided mentioning the subject’ but she suggests that illegitimacy was at the origin of Bodichon’s ‘unconventional habits and ideas’.⁵² Similarly, Hirsch hypothesizes that ‘perhaps her own illegitimate birth gave her a special sympathy for the “outlaws” of the world’.⁵³ And she adds that ‘Barbara’s rather ambiguous social position paradoxically allowed her an unusual social mobility’.⁵⁴ Had her mother lived, she may have had ‘a shadowed life, never fully able to enter the public domain’.⁵⁵

While scholars generally agree on justifying Bodichon’s progressive feminist outlook on grounds of her family, educational, and religious background, they are less unanimous in assessing the impact of her ‘far-sighted’ feminism. Caine has expressed her doubts about Bodichon’s leadership and influence upon other feminist activists. For her, ‘although the galvanizing force behind the [Langham Place] group, [Bodichon] exercised relatively little influence on it and certainly did not set its dominant tone’. According to Caine, few of Bodichon’s progressive ideas ‘were transmitted or communicated in a sufficiently powerful way to make an impact’. Consequently, the next generation of feminists, though they acknowledged her involvement in the married women’s property campaign and in the foundation of Girton College, did not draw on Bodichon’s feminist thought. This is so, according to Caine, because she ‘failed to impress the women’s movement with her own sense of the urgency of suffrage or the importance of allowing women a wider scope for independent action’. In the same way, Caine also attributes Bodichon’s failure to impact both her feminist co-workers and successors to ‘her own personal rebellion’ – to ‘her attempt to work out a private and a professional life which was quite outside the bounds of Victorian

⁵⁰ Matthews, J. (1983) p.93.

⁵¹ Herstein, S. (1985) p.15.

⁵² Ibid, p.16.

⁵³ Hirsch, P. (1998) p.289.

⁵⁴ Ibid, p.viii.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p.30.

convention'. As a result, she ultimately 'failed to become in any way part of the framework of Victorian feminism'.⁵⁶

Caine also expresses her disinclination to acknowledge Bodichon's achievements in her review of Daphne Bennett's biography of Emily Davies.⁵⁷ Bennett's work seeks to redress the unsympathetic treatment Davies has traditionally aroused among scholars.⁵⁸ Her somewhat harsh character, her insistence on an irreproachable ladylike behaviour by the leaders of the women's movement and her seemingly conservative feminist stance⁵⁹ was already pointed out by her contemporaries, including Bodichon and the first Girton students. Bennett aims to show that Davies was absolutely indispensable in the movement for 'the liberation of women'. She does so by attributing Davies' 'bad press' (in Caine's words) on Bodichon.⁶⁰ Bodichon is presented as an unreliable helpmate, 'blowing hot one minute, cold the next, incoherent in thought and devoid of practical sense', more interested in her personal life than in Davies' struggle to secure a university college for women.⁶¹ Caine's review laments that Bennett's study is not the re-evaluation Davies needs.⁶² However, she points out that Bennett's portrait of Bodichon, though it 'requires critical scrutiny', 'does offer a possible answer to the question of why, with all her talent, Bodichon really did so little either as an artist or in the women's movement'.⁶³

In contrast to Caine, Burton, Matthews, Herstein, and Hirsch claim Bodichon's importance for the feminist movement in England. They assert her pivotal role as a feminist theorist and as the leading initiator, (intermittent) organizer, and catalyst of the mid-nineteenth-century women's movement. For

⁵⁶ Caine, B. (1997) pp.99-100. Unlike Caine, Herstein claims that Bodichon 'was considered by her contemporaries as the leader of the mid-Victorian feminist movement in the third quarter of the nineteenth century', Herstein, S. (1985) p.xiii.

⁵⁷ Bennett, D. (1990) *Emily Davies and the Liberation of Women, 1830-1921* (London: André Deutsch); Caine, B. (1991) [untitled, review of Bennett, D. (1990)], *Victorian Studies*, 34 (4) pp.505-506.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p.505.

⁵⁹ Caine's biographical sketch of Emily Davies in *Victorian Feminists* argues that her complex feminist approach hides two apparently contradictory sides: her conservatism in terms of form and her uncompromising feminism in terms of content. The clearest example is her educational outlook. She expected of Girton students an impeccably feminine conduct but she insisted on providing for them an equal education to boys. Davies was adamant: providing women with a different education would mean giving them an inferior instruction, Caine, B. (1992) *Victorian Feminists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) pp.54-102.

⁶⁰ Caine, B. (1991) p.505.

⁶¹ Bennett, D. (1990) p.75.

⁶² Caine provided such a re-evaluative study in her biographical sketch of Davies in Caine, B. (1992).

⁶³ Caine, B. (1991) p.506.

Herstein, 'Bodichon's significance in British feminism is clear': before her, there was no organized women's movement. She 'activated feminism' by publishing her pamphlet *Brief Summary in Plain Language of the Most Important Laws Concerning Women* (1854) and by organizing the Married Women's Property Campaign (1855-1857) – 'the first committee dedicated to removing female disabilities from the law'. Furthermore, Bodichon acted as catalyst by inspiring her friends and putting 'her family heritage of wealth and political acumen' to use on behalf of women. The Smith family had channelled their political energies into fighting against social and religious inequities for several generations and 'Bodichon continued that tradition'.⁶⁴ Similarly, Hirsch refers to Bodichon as the 'descendant of the powerful politically minded Smith dynasty'. In her view, it was first and foremost her political acumen which made her a potential leader of the women's movement. Hirsch also highlights Bodichon's personality:

She was highly intelligent, and for a woman of her time, well educated. She had independent money, which she regarded without embarrassment as a power to do good, and she had also, in Blandford Square, [Bodichon's London home] a base for political operations in London. Finally, she possessed that crucial, although indefinable skill of being able to inspire others.⁶⁵

According to her biographers, 'imbued with concepts of natural justice' inherited from her politically engaged family,⁶⁶ Bodichon was the author of some of the most influential feminist writings of the period. Her pamphlets were widely circulated and served as the theoretical underpinnings of the feminist campaigns in which she participated. Aware that her own progressive stance could alienate public opinion, she softened the tone of her writing pragmatically and reduced her feminist claims to the reasonably achievable. She 'combined a radical vision of the future with a realistic assessment of what was possible in the here and now'.⁶⁷ To be 'accessible and effective',⁶⁸ she wrote her first pamphlet, *Brief Summary*, strategically, in a 'clear',⁶⁹ 'unemotional ... [and] rather dull' style.⁷⁰ The tone was deliberately 'careful and dispassionate'⁷¹ so as to 'emphasize the reasonableness

⁶⁴ Herstein, S. (1985) p.192.

⁶⁵ Hirsch, P. (1998) p.85.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p.88.

⁶⁷ Matthews, J. (1983) p.109.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p.96.

⁶⁹ Herstein, S. (1985) p.71.

⁷⁰ Ibid, p.74.

⁷¹ Matthews, J. (1983) p.96.

of the case and the solidity of its foundation'.⁷² Her second most relevant pamphlet, *Women and Work* (1857), was more spontaneous, but also less well structured.⁷³ Her claim for more employment opportunities for women apparently rambled: 'important points are mixed with anecdotes or long tangential discussions of female fashions'.⁷⁴ According to Hirsch, it moved 'jerkily from sociological critique to reportage of women's experience in their direct challenges to the status quo'.⁷⁵ Nonetheless, 'the basic themes [were] plainly stated' and therefore 'the pamphlet's thrust was not totally obscured'.⁷⁶ Bodichon's occasional 'flamboyant prose'⁷⁷ made her the easy target of criticism from opponents but *Women and Work* best summarized the central principles of her feminist approach: women urgently need and want work and therefore better education and vocational training is required. In 'Middle-Class Schools for Girls' (1860) she restated her critical view on the lack of educational opportunities for middle-class girls and the deplorable low standard of those available. She urged authorities and influential people to raise money to narrow the gap between the provision of secondary schools for girls and boys. Her article 'Reasons for the Enfranchisement of Women' (1866) consisted of a forthright list of arguments in favour of women's political rights.

Though her 'theory was not elegantly refined',⁷⁸ scholars consider Bodichon a feminist thinker in her own right. According to Matthews, her theory is 'clothed in a few pamphlets, in articles in *The English Woman's Journal*, in working papers read to a Social Science congress, in diaries and letters to friends'. Written with an immediate purpose (working out a petition, conceiving a school, 'painting a picture, addressing a meeting, co-operating with a group of friends to run a press campaign'), her theory is intertwined with her feminist activities. As a result, hers is practical theory, not 'abstract analysis'.⁷⁹ Bodichon created her feminist theory 'on the hoof, so to speak', writes Hirsch.⁸⁰

⁷² Herstein, S. (1985) p.74.

⁷³ Ibid, p.126.

⁷⁴ Ibid, p.128.

⁷⁵ Hirsch, P. (1998) p.147.

⁷⁶ Herstein, S. (1985) p.127.

⁷⁷ Ibid, p.191.

⁷⁸ Hirsch, P. (1998) p.147.

⁷⁹ Matthews, J. (1983) pp.94-95.

⁸⁰ Hirsch, P. (1998) p.147.

Besides, Bodichon's charismatic personality stirred her network of friends and acquaintances in favour of the feminist cause. This aspect of her contribution to the women's movement is claimed unanimously. Emily Davies' biographer, Barbara Stephen, states that Bodichon was:

very handsome and attractive, and her generous character, overflowing with life and vigour, made her greatly beloved. These were no small advantages to so unpopular a cause as that of women's rights, and her influence was of great value; with her independence and originality (unwomanly as these qualities were then considered), she drew many friends to the cause, and her generous sympathy and frank enthusiasm were an inspiration to her fellow-workers on the same thorny path.⁸¹

Similarly, in 1986 historian Olive Banks wrote that 'perhaps the single most significant woman during the early days of the [women's] movement was ... Barbara Bodichon ... It was her ability to inspire others ... which was perhaps her chief contribution'.⁸² For her part, Herstein referred to Bodichon as a 'vibrant yet curiously vulnerable woman whose complex temperament made her a strikingly effective catalyst for the women's movement'.⁸³

Bodichon's feminist ideas and engaging personality were put into motion in defence of women's rights from the mid-1850s. For the next three decades she was at the front of the mid-Victorian feminist campaigns, according to scholars, in their early stages. She largely contributed to launching and organizing the Married Women's Property Campaign in 1855. She gathered friends around her, amongst whom writers Anna Jameson and Mary Howitt, and drew a petition in favour of a legal reform that would permit married women to hold property and have direct access to their own earnings. The committee drew the petition and coordinated its distribution and collection of signatures from Bodichon's London home, at 5 Blandford Square. The provisions included in the petition presented in both Houses of Parliament were not finally passed until 1893.⁸⁴ But this first effort involved the creation of informal feminist networks across the country that resulted in new sympathizers and active supporters that participated in further feminist endeavours. According to Herstein:

⁸¹ Stephen, B. (1927) p.4.

⁸² Banks, O. (1986) p.133.

⁸³ Herstein, S. (1985) p.95.

⁸⁴ See Holcombe, L. (1983).

All feminist activity for the next half century was an extension of that first cooperative effort, while every effort by women on their own behalf stemmed from Barbara [Leigh] Smith's expressed conviction that women, when organized and active, could affect their own destiny.⁸⁵

This first organized feminist group established a pattern of activism that was to be replicated on endless occasions in subsequent feminist campaigns. It consisted of gathering like-minded women and male supporters of the cause; writing a manifesto presenting the rationale of the campaign; drafting a petition to be distributed and signed by partisans; and presenting it to Parliament by supporting MPs. Simultaneously, the unfolding of events was to be publicized in newspapers like the *Westminster Review* and associations such as The Law Amendment Society and the Social Science Association. Bodichon participated in all these stages in each of the four main campaigns in which she was engaged. Biographers recognize that Bodichon participated in the movement intermittently. For Herstein, it was her character, needful of changing stimulations,⁸⁶ which made her participate irregularly: 'Throughout her life Bodichon became dissatisfied once a feminist project had moved beyond its initial stages. The detail work required to complete a campaign was invariably left to others. ... Beginnings were her talent'.⁸⁷ In her view, she embraced projects 'briefly, albeit intensely'.⁸⁸ Bodichon's active lifestyle is also pointed out as a determining factor. Her frequent painting and sketching trips at home and abroad and her Algerian sojourns for half the year did not permit her to give steady attention to one campaign during long periods of time. Hirsch claims that at one point Bodichon experienced difficulties in attending to all her duties: 'to her husband, to her family in England, to social reform and to her artistic career'.⁸⁹ Likewise, Herstein states that Bodichon 'had difficulty reconciling her artistic commitment with her social activism'.⁹⁰ Bodichon was enjoying her one-year honeymoon in North-America when the Married Women's Property Petition was presented in Parliament. Similarly, she was settling into her Algerian home when *The English Woman's Journal* first came out. Hirsch recognizes that Bodichon's

⁸⁵ Herstein, S. (1985) p.94.

⁸⁶ Ibid, p.21.

⁸⁷ Ibid, p.147.

⁸⁸ Ibid, p.21.

⁸⁹ Hirsch, P. (1998) p.190.

⁹⁰ Herstein, S. (1985) p.97.

multifarious interests made her experience 'some strain in trying to attend to all her duties'.⁹¹ Bodichon herself confided to Elizabeth Whitehead Malleson: 'I wish I had three immortal lives. I would spend one only with my Eugène, and the other two for art and social work'.⁹² Lack of health was another factor that limited Bodichon's involvement in the women's movement. The stroke she suffered at the age of 50 affected her activism for the rest of her life. But more than that, she happened to be indisposed at crucial moments in the feminist campaigns. This is the case for example in 1867, when she spent half the year recovering from typhoid fever while the women's suffrage campaign was beginning to be fought. On these grounds, biographers describe her feminist activism as intermittent. For Burton, 'Barbara was the sower of seed. She scattered ideas broadcast, leaving others to tend the flowers that grew from them'.⁹³

Writing some decades ago, Matthews stated that Bodichon 'has all but disappeared from the history of the nineteenth century'.⁹⁴ Herstein lamented that although she was 'considered by her contemporaries as the leader of the mid-Victorian feminist movement in the third quarter of the nineteenth century ... little has been written about her'.⁹⁵ Hirsch added that she 'is much less well-known than one would expect from her achievements'.⁹⁶ Her 'name was quickly forgotten'.⁹⁷ Today, having been the object of scholarly interest, Bodichon can no longer be regarded as 'the most important unstudied figure of mid-[nineteenth-]century English feminism'.⁹⁸ As I discuss in the following section, in dialogue with this rich body of scholarship, in this study I explore an alternative approach to Bodichon with a view to providing a nuanced portrait of this already thoroughly studied historical figure. Using the concept of *Bildung* (self-cultivation), this thesis carries out a critical revision of her feminism that draws attention to Bodichon's bourgeois and ethnocentric standpoint.

⁹¹ Hirsch, P. (1998) p.190.

⁹² Bodichon to Malleson, n.d., quoted in Malleson, H. (1926) pp.51-52.

⁹³ Burton, H. (1949) p.113.

⁹⁴ Matthews, J. (1983) p.90.

⁹⁵ Herstein, S. (1985) p.xiii.

⁹⁶ Hirsch, P. (1998) p.ix.

⁹⁷ Ibid, p.320.

⁹⁸ Helsing, E.K., Sheets, R.L. and Veeder, W. (1983) *The Woman Question: Society and Literature in Britain and America, 1837 to 1883* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), Vol. II, p.147, quoted in Hirsch, P. (1998) p.ix.

2.2 Bodichon Revisited

Together with her publications, Bodichon's letters largely form the underpinnings of her biographies. As Rebecca Earle writes: 'Mined for quotations, read for content, analysed for meaning, letters form the hidden underpinnings of much historical research'.⁹⁹ In Hirsch's own words, letters are the 'brilliantly' 'coloured enamel' fragments of her portrait. Combined with less lustrous 'Census material, documents from public record offices and legal documents that have long laid in dusty boxes', these pieces constitute the biographical mosaic of Bodichon's life.¹⁰⁰ In an attempt to make the most of the (very often scarce) primary sources available, biographers make use of a combination of records to provide the most comprehensive analysis of historical figures. Memoirs, personal correspondence, contemporary newspapers, and official documents are among the most frequently used historical evidence. Approaching letters (and, as I will show, artwork) from a new perspective, two authors stand out within Bodichon studies: Pauline Nestor's article 'Negotiating a self: Barbara Bodichon in America and Algiers' and Deborah Cherry's monographs *Painting Women: Victorian Women Artists* and *Beyond the Frame: Feminism and Visual Culture, Britain 1850-1900*.¹⁰¹ Methodologically innovative, these studies provide a nuanced portrait of Bodichon.

Analyzing the epistolary self that emerges in Bodichon's travel writing, Nestor re-examines the implications of Bodichon's nomadic lifestyle in terms of the new opportunities for self-fashioning it opened for her. Unpacking the subject positions Bodichon takes up in her letters, the author interprets Bodichon's epistolary voice as a 'reinvention' of her self parallel to her travelling. This approach to Bodichon's epistolary self-construction permits Nestor to assess the implications of her travelling and living abroad from a new angle. Partially opposing readings of Bodichon's voyages which interpret them as ultimately problematic, Nestor proposes a more positive evaluation whereby changing and stimulating geographic mobility allowed Bodichon to forge a new and contingent

⁹⁹ Earle, R. (ed.) (1999) *Epistolary Selves. Letters and Letter-Writers, 1600-1945* (Aldershot: Ashgate) p.1.

¹⁰⁰ Hirsch, P. (1998) pp.ix-x.

¹⁰¹ Nestor, P.A. (2005) 'Negotiating a Self: Barbara Bodichon in America and Algiers', *Postcolonial Studies: Culture, Politics, Economy*, 8 (2) pp.155-164; Cherry, D. (1993) *Painting Women: Victorian Women Artists* (London and New York: Routledge); Cherry, D. (2000) *Beyond the Frame: Feminism and Visual Culture, Britain 1850-1900* (London and New York: Routledge).

self – a question I address in detail in chapter 5 following *Bildung*'s notion of self-alienation.

In her article Nestor explores the potential of leaving England for nineteenth-century middle-class women in terms of self-construction. In her view:

the life of Barbara Bodichon provides a fascinating example of a woman who used travel both to critique and to mediate the demands of nineteenth-century England. Neither completely an exile, nor ever simply returned settler, Bodichon alternated two worlds throughout much of her adult life in a way which facilitated her strategic engagement and disengagement with the politics of Victorian England.¹⁰²

Nestor understands the politics of departure as 'an expression of ideological resistance – a self-conscious repudiation and critique of the society left behind – and an opportunity for a new kind of self-construction or self-fashioning'. Accordingly, Bodichon, who 'took her impetus to travel' from a 'sense of discontent', found in 'the unprecedented opportunities for travel' a new option for her: to turn 'one's back on home and convention and seeking new and less oppressive circumstance in the beyond'.¹⁰³

Travelling was thus a 'transformative experience' that gave Bodichon more freedom and 'a startling and critical perspective on her former life'.¹⁰⁴ Her honeymoon trip to America for instance provided her 'unparalleled social freedom: she dressed as she wanted, consorted with whom she chose, and found the psychological space in which to establish a new and authoritative sense of self'.¹⁰⁵ According to Nestor, there, 'free from the constraints and expectations of home', Bodichon 'both established the ground-rules for a most unconventional marriage and carved out a role for herself as an artist'. The exhilarating experience of freedom (this new selfhood) was translated into an epistolary self that was 'at once authoritative and fearless'. Bodichon's sense of courage when refusing 'prohibitions, attending church services as the only white person, travelling with negroes in the segregated cabins of the paddle steamer, attending a slave auction on her own', gave Bodichon the impression that she was entitled 'to speak with authority and superiority of vision'.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Nestor, P.A. (2005) p.156.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, p.158.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, pp.158-159.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p.159.

This outspoken attitude contrasted with the tempered tone of her writings back in England. In her country Bodichon felt compelled, 'both by her own sense of discretion and by the urgings of others', to moderate her words. Instead, in America 'Bodichon's writing on slavery afforded her a freedom of expression and release of indignation' as she had not experienced before.¹⁰⁷ As a result, Bodichon always:

found it difficult simply to fit back into a settled life in England. In fact, she never did – instead she led a peripatetic life for the next twenty years, alternating every six months or so between residence in Algiers with Eugène and in England largely without him.¹⁰⁸

Algeria offered Bodichon a new world, 'always alien and not quite home', where she experienced an extension of 'the freedoms she first tasted in America'. Thus, 'as an outsider in a diverse and cosmopolitan culture, Bodichon found in Algiers the freedom from class and race constraints that she had so relished in America'.¹⁰⁹ Most crucially, she developed herself as an artist. Algeria offered time and inspiration for the 150 paintings she consecrated to Algerian sea- and landscapes and which made her gain reputation as a watercolour artist.

Nestor concludes her epistolary study of Bodichon by stating that:

the pattern of travel that Bodichon established for most of her adult life, regularly alternating between Algiers and England, allowed for a crucial, sometimes painful, but ultimately enabling fragmentation or compartmentalising of her life – a fragmentation which allowed her to negotiate the conflicting pulls of ambition, duty and desire in a way that few Victorian women could.¹¹⁰

Nestor's conclusion is a revision of Hirsch's and Burton's understanding of Bodichon as increasingly feeling regret about having to live away from England, 'estranged from the pulse of social affairs'.¹¹¹ In Nestor's view, Hirsch and Burton's interpretation is 'if not misreading, at least too partial a view of Bodichon's complex feelings on the matter'. For in Algeria she could take refuge from 'the claims of her English life, which could at times be relentless,' and thus take a retreat. In the same way, 'In Algiers she could be the artist and repudiate the

¹⁰⁷ Nestor, P.A. (2005) p.160.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, p.161.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Hirsch, P. (1998) p.237, quoted in Nestor, P.A. (2005) p.162.

philanthropist'.¹¹² More than that, 'Algiers functioned as a psychological safeguard against one aspect of her self. She invested it with her artistic identity and allowed it to act as a counterbalance to social activism'.¹¹³ In Nestor's eyes, 'By splitting her worlds through travel, Bodichon mediated between those worlds, and forged for herself a new and more contingent sociability'.¹¹⁴

For her part, Cherry reads the autobiographical narratives and artistic productions of Victorian female artists (including Bodichon) as created in and by systems of signification ordered in sexual difference. Drawing on Elizabeth Cowie's theoretical project, she analyses the sign 'woman' that nineteenth-century female painters produced, redefined and circulated through their lifestyle as painters – documented in memoirs, letters and published autobiographies – and through their artwork.¹¹⁵ For example, she teases out 'the relations of class power which shaped the exchange of looks between artist and model' in Bodichon's 1854 pencil sketch of Elizabeth Siddall – a Pre-Raphaelite muse and artist, formerly a milliner and by then presenting symptoms of consumption. Cherry argues that, in her visual representation Bodichon portrayed the sitter 'with massive forehead, columnar neck, large heavy lids and averted gaze' – her appearance 'reworked into a blank and passive mask of beauty'. As a result, the woman Siddall was transformed into the sign 'Siddall': an ideal of working-class femininity codified by a bourgeois painter. Cherry supports her argument by referring to Bodichon's description of her relationship with Siddall in a letter she sent to Parkes. Distancing herself from this working-class woman Bodichon wrote: 'Miss S.[iddall] is a genius and very beautiful and although she is not a lady her mind is poetic'. Cherry concludes that, both in her sketch and letter, Bodichon treated Siddall 'as an object of philanthropic concern who needed hospitalization as an invalid', not as a fellow-artist.¹¹⁶ Accounting for their discursivity, Cherry reads Bodichon's sketch and letter not as 'transparent records' detailing her life and describing her work but as documents 'saturated in and structured by

¹¹² Nestor, P.A. (2005) p.162.

¹¹³ Ibid, pp.162-163.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p.163.

¹¹⁵ Elizabeth Cowie considers that woman as a sign does not signify women but functions as the signifier of difference in relation to men. As such, 'woman' is not a given biologically or psychologically, but is a category produced in signifying practices, Cowie, E. (1978) 'Woman as sign', *m/f*, 1 pp.49-63.

¹¹⁶ Cherry, D. (1993) p.189.

historical conditions and discourses'.¹¹⁷ Thus, following a different approach to letters as historical evidence, in her books Cherry provides a critical portrait of Bodichon.

In line with Nestor and Cherry, my doctoral research seeks to bring a new theoretical and methodological perspective within Bodichon studies with a view to providing a nuanced portrait of this already studied figure. This thesis explores the significance of letters (read as *performative* autobiographical acts, as I will discuss in chapter 4) in the unfolding of Bodichon's *Bildung* (her self-cultivation, her personal growth). The analysis of Bodichon's epistolary dialogues suggests that letters acted as educational instruments – as sources of *Bildung*. They functioned as forums where she acquired knowledge and exercised her critical thinking (chapter 5); she carved out her identity at the intersection of her feminist, philanthropic and artistic activities (chapter 6); and negotiated her autonomy – here understood as her capacity to act in accordance with her self-conception (chapter 7).¹¹⁸ My suggestion is that putting into play a revised understanding of the educational term *Bildung* permits highlighting problematic aspects of Bodichon's feminism that scholars only briefly address (with the notable exception of Cherry): her bourgeois and ethnocentric standpoint. As I will show throughout chapters 5, 6 and 7, the study of Bodichon's epistolary *Bildung* suggests that, in her exercise of self-cultivation, she inadvertently excluded other social groups, namely the working-class and native women. Thus, focusing on her feminism as articulated in her letters,¹¹⁹ in this thesis I nuance the 'far-reaching' and 'progressive' nature of Bodichon's stance outlined in the previous section. Though her feminist outlook was 'more advanced' than that of her co-workers (as scholars unanimously claim), my epistolary study of Bodichon's *Bildung* reveals that her feminism unfolds within an exclusionary framework that leaves (female) Others¹²⁰ out of the autonomous subjectivity she claimed for herself.

¹¹⁷ Cherry, D. (1993) p.7.

¹¹⁸ As I will further outline, the notion of autonomy that underpins the *gebildet* (cultured) subject has been challenged by feminist scholarship. As part of my revised application of *Bildung*, I draw on Diana Meyers' reformulated conceptualization of autonomy, Meyers, D.T. (1989) *Self, Society and Personal Choice* (New York and Oxford: Columbia University Press).

¹¹⁹ As I further outline in chapter 4, in this thesis I focus on Bodichon's letters and I only briefly contrast them to her publications.

¹²⁰ I employ the term 'Other' to refer to a broad definition of the notion of alterity – the entity in contrast to which one's identity is constructed. The 'Other's stands for the 'difference' against which one develops his/her identity. As a result, one speaks from his/her standpoint – as opposed to (and often involving relations of power with) the Other.

My study of Bodichon's epistolary articulation of her *Bildung* leads to a re-examination of Bodichon that bridges other scholarly gaps. In line with Burton, Matthews, Herstein and Hirsch, I examine Bodichon's superior education in terms of Unitarian views on women's intellectual capacities as rational creatures. Yet, I also highlight the gendered (and thus not fully egalitarian vis-à-vis men) nature of Bodichon's education – the gendered inflection of her *Bildung*. Likewise, in line with Bodichon studies, I trace the Leigh Smith family's liberal political views in Bodichon's outlook. Yet, I provide a nuanced understanding of the 'advanced ideas, strange new philosophies and breath-taking gusts of freedom'¹²¹ that characterized the Leigh Smith family environment. I unpack 'the powerful politically minded Smith dynasty'¹²² by bringing the attention to the limits of Bodichon's (and her family's) conceptualization of freedom and natural justice. Finally, this thesis also addresses the question of Bodichon's 'eccentricity',¹²³ her 'absolute contempt for convention',¹²⁴ and her 'reckless indifference to public opinion'.¹²⁵ I tease out Herstein's and Burton's assessment of Bodichon by exploring how she challenged but also uncritically adopted (gender) normativity in the subject positions she took up in her letters. Ultimately, focusing on the development of Bodichon's individuality as articulated in her letters, this thesis traces the unfolding of Bodichon's feminist and artistic self-conception and throws light upon the 'contentious' assessment of her significance for the women's movement and her achievements within the mid-Victorian art world.

Conclusion

In this chapter I presented the relevant literature related to my study of Bodichon. I showed that she is today a thoroughly studied historical figure. Yet, the general understanding we have of Bodichon is, overall, unproblematically positive. Scholars claim Bodichon's feminism as cohesively comprehensive since she regarded educational, economic, legal and political disabilities as the interconnected causes of women's unequal position in society vis-à-vis men.

¹²¹ See footnote 33.

¹²² See footnote 65.

¹²³ See footnote 18.

¹²⁴ See footnote 20.

¹²⁵ See footnote 16.

Scholars also interpret her feminist outlook as far-reaching and more advanced than that of her colleagues at the Langham Place Circle. They justify her progressive feminist outlook on grounds of her family and religious background and point out, although not unanimously, the significance of her role as a theorist, leading initiator, (intermittent) organizer, and catalyst of the mid-Victorian women's movement. In line with Pauline Nestor and Deborah Cherry's new departure in Bodichon studies, I suggested that reading Bodichon's personal correspondence through the lens of *Bildung* leads to a nuanced portrait of her. Thus, this thesis explores the significance of letters in the unfolding of her self-cultivation. It examines the extent to which letters acted as educational instruments – as sources of *Bildung*. It analyses how they functioned as forums where Bodichon acquired knowledge and exercised her critical thinking (chapter 5); forged her identity (chapter 6); and worked out her autonomy (chapter 7). In this chapter I argued that putting into play a revised understanding of the educational term *Bildung* permits pointing out problematic aspects of Bodichon's feminism that her biographers only briefly address – the bourgeois and ethnocentric underpinnings of her outlook. As I will now discuss, reading Bodichon's letters through the lens of *Bildung* also permits exploring informal sources of education.

3 Education as *Bildung*

Introduction

In this chapter I put forward the theoretical framework that structures my epistolary study of Barbara Bodichon's *Bildung*. In section 3.1. I examine literature related to the history of women's education in England in the nineteenth century. I argue that published studies tend to focus on women's opportunities for schooling and examinations. Seeking to contribute to this body of scholarship, I discuss how my study of Bodichon's epistolary self-cultivation throws light upon informal sources of education: it examines letters as sources of intersubjective learning and personal growth – that is, as sources of *Bildung*. In the following section I discuss in detail the meaning of this neo-humanist educational term as defined by Prussian statesman and scholar Wilhelm von Humboldt. *Bildung* is an educational ideal that refers to the lifelong process of bringing all the potentials contained within each man to full expression as a means towards an ideal humanity and progress. *Bildung* seeks the intellectual and moral growth of individuals as it results from an active and critical engagement with the diversity of the world.

In section 3.3. I put forward the epistolary study of Bodichon's *Bildung* I propose in this thesis. I present the narrative model of self-cultivation that I develop, which follows *Bildung*'s principle of forging one's individuality through interactive social intercourse and draws on narrative models of identity formation. Next, I contrast *Bildung* to the Unitarian philosophy of education as a way of justifying my reading of Bodichon's personal correspondence through this neo-humanist educational term. I conclude the chapter by discussing the revised understanding of *Bildung* I propose in this thesis, articulated within three axes: autonomy, power, and harmonious self.

3.1 Middle-Class Women's Education in the Victorian Era

The history of women's education in England in the nineteenth century has received intense scrutiny.¹ Carol Dyhouse, Margaret Bryant, Joan Burstyn, Felicity Hunt, June Purvis and Margaret Gomersall have published studies on the provision of education for middle- and working-class girls and women.² Andrea Jacobs has explored the educational, social and economic significance of the development of public examinations for girls. Christine de Bellaigue and Maria Tamboukou have examined the development of the teaching profession for women and the identities of female teachers respectively.³ Women's participation in education as policy makers has been the focus of attention of Jane Martin, and, in collaboration with Joyce Goodman, they have explored the question of

¹ In this thesis I focus on the history of girls' and women's education in England. There were different trajectories across Britain and Ireland along religious and class lines. As Joyce Goodman outlines, girls' education 'was inflected by Anglicanism in England, Presbyterianism in Scotland, Nonconformity in Wales, and Catholicism in Ireland'. Elementary education was accessed by the working classes and secondary education (termed 'intermediate' in Wales and Ireland) by middle- and upper-class girls. In England, girls' secondary education was divided into independent fee-paying schools (attended by the wealthiest upper-class girls) and endowed and state-maintained schools (attended by middle-class and outstanding working-class girls). Social class differentiations were less marked in state-maintained schools in Scotland. In Wales, mixed female and male schools were introduced at the end of the nineteenth-century, Goodman, J. (2010) 'Class and Religion: Great Britain and Ireland', in Albisetti, J., Goodman, J. and Rogers, R. (eds) *Girls Secondary Education in the Western World* (New York: Palgrave) p.9. See also McDermid, J. (2012) *The Schooling of Girls in Britain and Ireland, 1800-1900* (London: Routledge); Raftery, D., McDermid, J. and Elwyn Jones, G. (2007) 'Social Change and Education in Ireland, Scotland and Wales: Historiography on Nineteenth-Century Schooling', *History of Education*, 36 (4) pp.447-463. More recently, scholars have paid attention to colonial education. For instance, Rebecca Rogers has published on vocational training in France at the time of Bodichon's residence in Algeria, Rogers, R. (2009) 'Telling Stories about the Colonies: British and French Women in Algeria in the Nineteenth Century', *Gender and History*, 21 (1) pp.39-59; Rogers, R. (2012) 'Language Learning versus Vocational Training: French, Arab and British Voices Speak about Indigenous Girls' Education in Nineteenth-Century Colonial Algeria', *Paedagogica Historica*, 48 (3) pp.369-379.

² Dyhouse, C. (1976) 'Social Darwinistic Ideas and the Development of Women's Education in England, 1880-1920', *History of Education*, 5 (1) pp.41-58; Dyhouse, C. (1977) 'Good Wives and Little Mothers: Social Anxieties and the Schoolgirls' Curriculum, 1890-1920', *Oxford Review of Education*, 3 (1) pp.21-33; Bryant, M. (1979) *The Unexpected Revolution: A Study in the Education of Women and Girls in the Nineteenth Century* (London: University of London Institute of Education); Burstyn, J. (1980) *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood* (London: Croom Helm); Hunt, F. (ed.) (1987) *Lessons for Life: The Schooling of Girls and Women, 1850-1950* (New York: Basil Blackwell); Purvis, J. (1989) *Hard Lessons: The Lives and Education of Working-Class Women in Nineteenth Century England* (Cambridge: Polity Press); Purvis, J. (1991) *A History of Women's Education in England* (Philadelphia: Open University Press); Gomersall, M. (1997) *Working-Class Girls in Nineteenth Century England* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Limited).

³ Bellaigue, C. de (2001) 'The Development of Teaching as a Profession for Women before 1870', *The Historical Journal*, 44 (4) pp.963-988; Tamboukou, M. (2003) *Women, Education and the Self: A Foucauldian Perspective* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan); Jacobs, A.E. (2003) 'Girls and Examinations, 1860-1902', PhD. Thesis, University of Southampton.

subjectivity and authority through a selection of women educational activists.⁴

The history of the women's education movement, including its leaders and the educational institutions for women they founded, have also been extensively studied by authors such as Josephine Kamm, Joyce Pedersen, Sara Delamont, and Philippa Levine.⁵ These works have extensively brought the category of gender to the fore, largely missing in traditional accounts of the history of education in England.⁶ However, the general focus of this literature is placed on the discussion of women's opportunities for schooling and examinations.

In nineteenth-century England, an influential bourgeois domestic ideology determined the form and content of the education of middle-class girls and women. The prescriptive gendered division of the private and public spheres was grounded on the perceived biological differences between men and women.⁷ Women were primarily seen as wives and mothers and thus defined in relation to men and children. They were considered inferior and subordinate to men and

⁴ Martin, J. (1999) *Women and the Politics of Schooling in Victorian and Edwardian England* (Leicester: Leicester University Press); Goodman, J. and Martin, J. (2004) *Women and Education 1800-1980: Educational Reform and Personal Identity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan). See also Goodman, J. and Harrop, S. (eds) (2000) *Women, Educational Policy-Making and Administration in England: Authoritative Women since 1800* (London: Routledge).

⁵ Stephen, B. (1927) *Emily Davies and Girton College* (London: Constable); Tuke, M.J. (1939) *A History of Bedford College for Women* (London and New York: Oxford University Press); Scrimgeour, M. (ed.) (1950) *The North London Collegiate School 1850-1950. A Hundred Years of Girls' Education* (London: Oxford University Press); Clarke, A. K. (1953) *A History of the Cheltenham Ladies College, 1853-1953* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd); Kamm, J. (1958) *How Different from Us. A Biography of Miss Buss and Miss Beale* (London: Bodley Head); Kaye, E. (1972) *A History of Queen's College, London, 1848-1972* (London: Chatto and Windus); McWilliams-Tullberg, R. (1975) *Women at Cambridge: A Men's University – Though of a Mixed Type* (London: Gollancz); Delamont, S. (1978) 'The Contradictions in Ladies' Education', in Delamont, S. and Duffin, L. (eds) *The Nineteenth-Century Woman: Her Cultural and Physical World* (London: Croom Helm); Delamont, S. (1978a) 'The Domestic Ideology and Women's Education', in Delamont, S. and Duffin, L. (eds); Finlay, J. (1987) *The History of Newnham Hall* (Launceston: AMC Search); Fletcher, S. (1980) *Feminists and Bureaucrats: A Study in the Development of Girls' Education in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: University Press); Pedersen, J.S. (1987) *The Reform of Girls' Secondary and Higher Education in Victorian England* (New York and London: Garland Publishing Inc); Levine, P. (1994) *Victorian Feminism, 1850-1900* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida); Gallant, M.P. (1997) 'Anne Jemima Clough and Women's Education', *History of Education*, 26 (2) pp.145-164; Hilton, M. and Hirsch, P. (eds) (2000) *Practical Visionaries: Women, Education and Social Process, 1790-1930* (New York: Longman).

⁶ Simon, B. (1960) *Studies in the History of Education 1780-1870* (London: Lawrence and Wishart); Barnard, H.C. (1961-1968) *A History of English Education: From 1760* (London: University of London Press); Curtis, S.J. (1965) *History of Education in Great Britain* (London: University Tutorial Press); Stewart, W.A.C. and McCann, W.P. (1967) *The Educational Innovators, 1750-1880* (London: Macmillan); Stewart, W.A.C. (1972) *Progressives and Radicals in English Education, 1750-1970* (New Jersey: Augustus M. Kelley).

⁷ In chapter 4 I outline that Amanda Vickery has challenged unproblematic references to the ideology of the separate spheres as a theoretical framework in historical research, Vickery, A. (1993) 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History', *The Historical Journal*, 36 (2) pp.383-414. In this section separate spheres refer to prescriptive notions of gendered natures and social roles present in the social imaginary and may have differed to the actual practices of men and women.

expected to be self-sacrificing.⁸ During childhood years, middle-class daughters often shared their education with their brothers. They were usually taught at home by members of the family and, if wealthy enough, by a governess and hourly paid tutors. Not being standardized, the quality of home education was variable.⁹ From the age of about ten to fourteen, middle-class girls were trained in accomplishments with a view to making them ladylike homemakers. Accomplishments included singing, modern languages, drawing, plain and fancy needlework, modelling flowers and fruit in wax and learning the codes of etiquette. As a cultured lady of leisure, the ladylike homemaker was 'expected to be a competent manager of a household but not to engage in routine domestic tasks herself'.¹⁰ These 'finishing' institutions ranged from cheap local day schools to costly fashionable boarding schools.¹¹ When middle-class girls reached adulthood, they might attend scientific and cultural societies – often on a part-time basis. In these mixed male and female institutions women were usually admitted to a restricted number of lectures and activities as a companion of an elected male member.¹² Access to higher education was denied to women. Exceptionally, a few isolated women were granted access to certain university lectures. But they did not have the right to sit examinations or to be awarded a degree.¹³

In view of the average low standard of middle-class women's education vis-à-vis their male counterparts, a women's education movement developed from the late 1840s onwards. The question of what, if any, education was to be provided for middle-class women was the object of heated debates held in the press, in the Social Science Association annual congresses and in private conversations. The general public believed that mental exertion would affect women's future capacity for reproduction; that their presence would shake male students and teachers' confidence; and that their distraction from their domestic duties would undermine the family unit.¹⁴

⁸ Purvis, J. (1991) p.2.

⁹ Ibid, pp.65-66 and p.68.

¹⁰ Ibid, p.6.

¹¹ Pedersen, J.S. (1987) pp.141-143.

¹² Purvis, J. (1991) pp.97-106.

¹³ Ibid, p.106.

¹⁴ Levine, P. (1994) p.26.

The women's education reform movement has often been explained on the grounds that further education was demanded by the increasing numbers of poorly educated middle-class women who, unable to be supported by a male member of the family, had to earn their own living. Few occupations were open to these class-conscious women apart from the overstocked and poorly paid job of governess. Improving the standard of training for governesses and women teachers became a matter of concern.¹⁵ In 1841 the Governesses' Benevolent Institution was founded to assist 'ladies in temporary distress' with annuities of twenty pounds. Under the impulse of Christian Socialist Frederick Denison Maurice, a group of professors of King's College, London, gave lectures and granted certificates of proficiency to governesses with the purpose of improving the standards of their work. These lectures developed into Queen's College, established in 1848. A year later, Elizabeth Reid founded the non-denominational Bedford College. Reid was a Unitarian widow who had participated in the anti-slavery campaign with Bodichon's aunt Julia Smith. Smith was a student there and acted as a member of the council and as a lady visitor. Bedford College offered secondary education for women to make up for deficiencies in earlier education. Students took either short-term courses or a four-year course to obtain a certificate of general proficiency in teaching.¹⁶

The emergence of the women's education movement has also been explained as being part of the wider movement in favour of women's rights, which gathered momentum in the 1850s and 1860s.¹⁷ Middle-class women's awareness of their imposed 'uselessness' in a context where society valued self-fulfilling industriousness led them to claim their right to wider forms of (intellectual) self-expression.¹⁸ Thus, the foundation of new educational opportunities for bourgeois women became the major priority of the mid-Victorian women's movement. As Levine writes:

Women saw education as the key to a broad range of other freedoms; as a means of training for paid employment, as a means of

¹⁵ Purvis, J. (1991) p.75.

¹⁶ Strachey, R. (1928) *The Cause. A Short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britain* (London: G. Bell and Sons) pp.60-63; Hirsch, P. (1998) *Barbara Bodichon: Feminist, Artist and Rebel* (London: Chatto and Windus) pp.39-40.

¹⁷ See for example Strachey, R. (1928); Banks, O. (1981) *Faces of Feminism. A Study of Feminism as a Social Movement* (New York: St Martin's Press); Rendall, J. (1985) *The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France and the United States, 1780-1860* (Basingstoke: Macmillan); Purvis, J. (1989).

¹⁸ Strachey, R. (1928) p.44.

alleviating the vacuity and boredom of everyday idleness and, of course, as the means to improving their ability to fight for the extension of female opportunities in a host of other areas.¹⁹

New types of academic school for middle-class girls and women were opened such as the North London Collegiate School (1850) and Cheltenham Ladies' College (1854). Their new *modus operandi* strongly influenced subsequent high schools and boarding schools for girls founded in the late nineteenth century. Managed by Frances Mary Buss and Dorothea Beale respectively, both headmistresses supported, though the latter initially rather reluctantly, Emily Davies' successful efforts to open the local examinations of Cambridge and Oxford to women – granted in 1865 and 1870 respectively. Buss, Beale and Bodichon – who took an active part in the formation of Davies' 'Committee for Obtaining Admission of Women to University Examinations in Art & Medicine' – also gave evidence for the Schools Enquiry Commission (the Taunton Commission) in 1865. The final report and the practical proposals offered by the commissioners, published three years later, informed subsequent legislation such as the Endowed Schools Act (1869), which included girls' schools in public funding.²⁰

The higher education movement developed from the 1860s onwards. The first major attempt to gain access to university study took place via part time extension classes, which developed in 1867 within the North of England Council for Promoting the Higher Education of Women – a Liverpool-based pressure group led by Anne Jemima Clough. Based on the rationale of separate and different education for women, the North of England Council sent a memorial to Cambridge University asking for an examination for women – granted in 1869. A series of special lectures for women to prepare them for the Women's Examinations were organized and in the mid-1870s this project was transformed into Newnham College.²¹ Interwoven with the women's education debate, a group of reformers campaigned to incorporate new subjects (modern languages and natural and engineering sciences) into the existing classical curriculum in secondary and higher educational institutions for boys. Some of these reformers

¹⁹ Levine, P. (1994) p.26.

²⁰ Kamm, J. (1958) pp.65-83; Strachey, R. (1928) p.132-140; Purvis, J. (1991) pp.77-78, p.85, and p.87; Hirsch, P. (1998) p.206.

²¹ Levine, P. (1994) p.44; Purvis, J. (1991) p.114.

saw in the projected women's schools the opportunity to implement this new curriculum.²²

The idea of a part-time and segregated university education for women oriented towards their future social roles as teachers and mothers was not the kind of education for women that Davies and her colleagues had in mind. In 1866 Davies asked London University to open the Matriculation Examination to women. She was offered a special examination for women instead, but Davies rejected it on the grounds that to have separate examinations would imply an inferior standard. Her insistence on a common curriculum and on emulating Oxbridge led her to establish Girton College in 1872, where female students studied the same courses and took the same examinations within the same time-scale as men.²³

As this brief overview shows, the body of literature on women's education in nineteenth-century England tends to study women's opportunities for formal education. There is a growing attention to informal and domestic education among middle-class girls and women. In "'To Think, to Compare, to Combine, to Methodise": Notes towards Rethinking Girls' Education in the Eighteenth Century', Michelle Cohen unpacks the dichotomies public/private and formal/informal. Cohen shows that these categories stood for prescriptive educational practices that denoted a devaluation of women's education. By the end of the eighteenth century, 'informal' education was promoted among boys for leading to intellectual individual autonomy as opposed to stultifying didactic methods. In contrast, 'informal' education among girls implied superficial learning and was discouraged since it led to personal initiative and intellectual ambition, presumably improper for their sex. Challenging this negative understanding of 'informal' education among women, Cohen argues for considering the informal aspects of girls' education more substantially as rich sources of learning.²⁴ In *Gender, Power and the Unitarians* Ruth Watts highlights the role of mothers,

²² Strachey, R. (1928) pp.143-144.

²³ Ibid, pp.142-143.

²⁴ Cohen, M. (2005) "'To Think, to Compare, to Combine, to Methodise": Notes towards Rethinking Girls' Education in the Eighteenth Century' in Knott, S. and Taylor, B. (eds) *Women, Gender and Enlightenment* (Basingstoke: Palgrave). See also Bolufer Peruga, M. (2005) 'Gender and the Reasoning Mind', in Knott, S. and Taylor, B. (eds); Rendall, J. (2005) "'Women that Would Plague me with Rational Conversation": Aspiring Women and Scottish Whigs, c1790-1830', in Knott, S. and Taylor, B. (eds).

relatives and tutors as educators at home among Unitarian families;²⁵ and in *Victorian Feminism* Levine briefly mentions that ‘Earlier generations of women had been essentially self-educated’.²⁶ Despite these notable exceptions, literature tends to focus on women’s opportunities for schooling and examinations. This thesis seeks to contribute to the history of women’s education in nineteenth-century England by shedding light on informal sources of education: it explores Bodichon’s personal correspondence as a source of intersubjective learning and personal growth. This thesis examines the significance of letter-writing and letter-exchange as dialogical forums where Bodichon (and her female correspondents) developed her self-cultivation. The following section outlines *Bildung* as theorized by Prussian author Wilhelm von Humboldt.

3.2 *Bildung* as Conceptualized by Wilhelm von Humboldt

Bildung is a neo-humanist educational term that emerged during the German Enlightenment, c.1750-1830. It encompasses a tangled web of meanings, connotations and usages so strongly tied to its historical and geographical context that it is difficult to translate. In the English-speaking scientific community, where *Bildung* is increasingly appearing in discussions in philosophy of education, the term is used in its German form or, alternatively, translated as self-cultivation, self-formation, self-education, edification or liberal education.²⁷ Its definition is equally elusive, not least because of the different approaches developed by its original theorists: Johann Gottfried von Herder, Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Friedrich Schiller, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Wilhelm von Humboldt, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.²⁸ The meaning of the term itself was significantly transformed throughout the nineteenth century.²⁹

²⁵ Watts, R. (1998) *Gender, Power and the Unitarians in England, 1760-1860* (London and New York: Longman) pp.129-136.

²⁶ Levine, P. (1994) p.28.

²⁷ See for example Cleary, J. and Hogan, P. (2001) ‘The Reciprocal Character of Self-Education: Introductory Comments on Hans-Georg Gadamer’s Address “Education is Self-Education”’, *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 35 (4) pp.519-527 (p.525).

²⁸ See for example Bruford, W.H. (1975) *The German Tradition of Self-Cultivation. ‘Bildung’ from Humboldt to Thomas Mann* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

²⁹ Bauer, W. (2003) ‘On the Relevance of *Bildung* for Democracy’, *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 35 (2) pp.211-225 (p.211).

In its general classical sense *Bildung* is an educational ideal that refers to the lifelong process of becoming cultured. Unlike mere knowledge acquisition and skill training, *Bildung* seeks the personal growth of individuals, in terms both of intellectual and moral transformation, as it results from an active engagement with the diversity of the world.³⁰ *Bildung* requires a balanced programme of intellectual, spiritual, aesthetic, and physical development. The etymology of the term *Bildung* encompasses the idea of an image/form (*Bild*) and the idea of formation/creation (*bilden*). Reminiscent of medieval mysticism, *Bildung* follows the idea that 'man carries in his soul the image of God, after whom he is fashioned, and which man must cultivate in himself'.³¹ The task of *Bildung* is to bring all the potentials contained within each man to full expression as a means towards an ideal humanity and progress.³² *Bildung* is 'the endless voyage of the individual towards him/her self as part of an ideal humanity'.³³

Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835) is one of the most prominent figures associated with *Bildung*. He was a Prussian statesman and author of writings on aesthetics, anthropology, linguistics and political theory. He was born into a family that entered the Prussian nobility through army services and bureaucracy appointments. On his mother's side, his ancestors were French Huguenots with a mercantile background. Educated at home by tutors, he studied at the universities of Frankfurt an der Oder and Gottingen. He worked intermittently as a scholar, ambassador, and government employee in several ministries. Most relevant for this study, as Head of the Section for Religion and Education in the Ministry of the Interior (1809-1810), Humboldt reorganized the Prussian educational system and founded the University of Berlin.³⁴

Humboldt put forward his theory of education in a series of writings, most notably in his book *Limits of State Action* (c.1791-1792) and, reminiscent of the significance of letters as forums for the exchange and development of viewpoints (which I highlight in this thesis), in his personal correspondence. A particularly

³⁰ In this chapter I deliberately use the terms 'individual'/'individuals', 'man'/'men' and male pronouns to reflect the original masculinist orientation of this term. I do so too in subsequent chapters when referring to the theory of *Bildung*.

³¹ Gadamer, H. (2004) *Truth and Method* (London and New York: Continuum) p.10.

³² Bleicher, J. (2006) '*Bildung*', *Theory Culture Society*, 23, pp.364-365 (p.365).

³³ Masschelein, J. and Ricken, N. (2003) 'Do We (Still) Need the Concept of *Bildung*?', *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 35 (2) pp.139-154 (p.140).

³⁴ Roberts, J. (2009) *Wilhelm von Humboldt and German Liberalism* (Oakville and Niagara Falls: Mosaic Press) pp.ii-vii.

relevant fragment of a letter written to poet and friend Karl Theodor Körner is now referred to as 'Theory of Human *Bildung*' (c.1793-1794).³⁵ In Humboldt's conceptualization of the term, *Bildung* stands for the fullest and most harmonious development of the potentialities of the individual into a coherent whole:

The true end of Man, or that which is prescribed by the eternal and immutable dictates of reason, and not suggested by vague and transient desires, is the highest and most harmonious development of his powers to a complete and consistent whole.³⁶

This education of the self is undertaken in tandem with the transformation of contemporary culture – i.e. mankind.³⁷ For *Bildung* implies contributing to an ideal humanity and to progress.

The process of self-cultivation takes place in interaction with the external world. Man's individuality can only become manifest through free and wide-ranging engagements with it. *Bildung* stands for 'the self-education of an autonomous individual under the impress of the cultural world'.³⁸ For *Kultur*³⁹ is edifying; it is the means through which man develops his capacities. Conceiving education as an energetic process Humboldt writes:

Just as sheer power requires an object on which to exert itself, and sheer form, or pure thought, a matter in which to express and

³⁵ Humboldt, W. von (1993) *Ideen zu einem Versuch, die Grenzen der Wirksamkeit des Staates zu bestimmen*, c1791-1792, translated and reprinted in Burrow, J.W. (ed.) *The Limits of State Action* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund); Humboldt, W. von (1960-1981) 'Theorie der Bildung des Menschen', c.1793-1794, reprinted in Flitner, A. and Giel, K. (eds) *Werke in fünf Bänden* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft). 'Theorie der Bildung des Menschen' is translated and reprinted in Humboldt, W. von (2000) 'Theory of Bildung', in Westbury, I., Hopmann, S. and Riwaarts, K. (eds) *Teaching as a Reflective Practice. The German Didaktik Tradition* (Mahwah and London: L. Erlbaum Associates). A selection of Humboldt's writings have been translated into English and compiled in Cowan, M. (ed.) (1963) *Humanist Without Portfolio: An Anthology of the Writings of Wilhelm von Humboldt* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press). Humboldt's letters, papers and essays were published posthumously by his brother Alexander. His main work, *The Sphere and Duties of Government* was published in German in 1851 and translated into English in 1854, Roberts, J. (2009) p.35 and p.82; Knoll, J.H. and Siebert, H. (1967) *Wilhelm von Humboldt: Politician and Educationist* (Bad Godesberg: Inter Nationes) p.12.

³⁶ Humboldt, W. von (1993) p.10. This paragraph was quoted by Mill in *On Liberty*, Mill, J.S. (1859) *On Liberty* (London: Longman, Green and Co.).

³⁷ Løvlie L. and Standish, P. (2003) 'Introduction: *Bildung* and the Idea of a Liberal Education', in Løvlie L., Mortensen K.P. and Nordenbo S.E. (eds) *Educating Humanity: Bildung in Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell) p.4.

³⁸ Ibid, p.7.

³⁹ The notion of *Kultur* in Humboldt's work remains an elusive term. In an unpublished essay, he distinguishes between civilisation and culture: 'Civilization [*Zivilisation*] is the humanization of nations in their external institutions and customs and the inner sentiments referring to these. Culture [*Kultur*] adds to this the refinement of social conditions, science, and art', Humboldt, W. von (1830-1835) 'On the Differences in Human Linguistic Structure and their Influence on the Spiritual Development of the Human Race' pp.13-64, Cowan, M. (ed.) (1963) p.266. *Kultur* seems to refer to the individual culture that a cultivated/*gebildet* man acquires. It incorporates both individual cultural knowledge and a collective production of culture to which men contribute through *Bildung*.

maintain itself, so too does man need a world outside of himself. This explains his drive to constantly expand the realm of his knowledge and effectiveness.⁴⁰

That is, the inner nature of humans requires the existence of an outside world so as to develop itself.⁴¹ It is the world through which men's fulfilment is achieved.⁴² Yet, man also critically absorbs from it. Being cultured (*gebildet*) requires a reflective attitude to the existing society. The *gebildet* man has a creative, transformative and reciprocal relation to his environment.⁴³ This creative mimesis permits him to extend into and assimilate with the outer world. He uses his mimetic abilities to extend towards the unknown and to incorporate it into his self in a critical fashion.⁴⁴ As Humboldt writes:

It is the ultimate task of our existence to achieve as much substance as possible for the concept of humanity in our person, both during the span of our life and beyond it, through the traces we leave by means of our vital activity. This can be fulfilled only by the linking of the self to the world to achieve the most general, most animated, and most unrestrained interplay.⁴⁵

For this critical engagement with the world to take place, man must distance from himself and his beliefs. Self-alienation is necessary if man is to be open to difference.⁴⁶ Critical learning and self-development can only occur as long as man 'plunge[s] in the unknown' and adopts an open attitude towards new knowledge.⁴⁷ Learning stands for the enrichment and extension of one's self as it results from engaging with others' perspectives.⁴⁸ Humboldt understands social relationships as the means through which to acquire 'the richness of the other'.⁴⁹ It is through the process of critical mimesis – i.e. the engagement with the outer world, its *Kultur* and humans through which man turns the unknown into

⁴⁰ Humboldt, W. von (1960-1981) n.d., Vol.1 p.235, quoted in Wulf, C. (2003) 'Perfecting the Individual: Wilhelm von Humboldt's Concept of Anthropology, *Bildung* and Mimesis', *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 35 (2) pp.241-249 (p.245).

⁴¹ Wulf, C. (2003) p.246.

⁴² Lüth, C. (1998) 'On Wilhelm von Humboldt's Theory of *Bildung* Dedicated to Wolfgang Klafki for his 70th Birthday', *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 30 (1) pp.43-60 (p.46).

⁴³ Burrow, J.W. (ed.) (1993) p.xxvii.

⁴⁴ Wulf, C. (2003) p.246.

⁴⁵ Humboldt, W. von (2000) p.58.

⁴⁶ Standish, P. (2003) 'Preface', in Løvlie L., Mortensen K.P. and Nordenbo S.E. (eds) p.vii.

⁴⁷ Varkøy, Ø. (2010) 'The Concept of *'Bildung'*', *Philosophy of Music Education Review*, 18 (1) pp.85-96 (p.91).

⁴⁸ Thompson, C. (2006) 'Adorno and the Borders of Experience: The Significance of the Nonidentical for a "Different" Theory of *Bildung*', *Educational Theory*, 56 (1) pp.69-87 (p.85).

⁴⁹ Humboldt, W. von (1960-1981) 1792, Vol.I pp.64-65, quoted and translated in Lüth, C. (1998) p.52.

individuality – that man experiences difference.⁵⁰ Contrast and resemblance with others create a friction that leads to a further precise definition of one's individuality.⁵¹

Involvement with the particularity of others means alienation from the self. However, retaining his independence, man does not emulate the other but transforms what he assimilates into his own being.⁵² As Humboldt notes, the interlocking of beings is not to transform one into another:

but to open up routes of access from one to the other. What an individual already possesses must be compared with what is received from the other and modified accordingly, but not oppressed by it.⁵³

Humboldt warns against the complete alienation of individuals from themselves as a result of this interaction with the world through social intercourse. In his view, the relevant aspect of looking to the external world is for man to reflect back into his inner self:

his nature drives him to reach beyond himself to the external objects, and here it is crucial that he should not lose himself in this alienation, but rather reflect back into his inner being the clarifying light and the comforting warmth of everything that he undertakes outside himself.⁵⁴

Man is to gain knowledge of the world: he observes the same objects in the world through various receptive faculties like perception, reason, feeling and imagination. These objects, perceived through different senses, become concepts in his mind. This perception of the world through a harmonious balance of the senses enhances the faculties of man – his 'own innate power'.⁵⁵ In other words, it is through the harmonious application of his various faculties (enhanced through the process of interaction with the world) that man develops his potential.⁵⁶

The more diverse situations and social relations man is exposed to, the richest his *Bildung* can be. In Humboldt's own words, 'The more man opens himself to these [experiences, situations, social relations], the more new sides will be stimulated and the livelier his inner activity will be in developing these new

⁵⁰ Wulf, C. (2003) pp.246-247.

⁵¹ Humboldt, W. von (1960-1981) 1797, Vol.I p.347, in Lüth, C. (1998) pp.52-53.

⁵² Ibid, 1792, Vol.I p.65, quoted and translated in Lüth, C. (1998) p.52.

⁵³ Ibid, 1792, Vol.I p.82, quoted and translated in Lüth, C. (1998) p.52.

⁵⁴ Humboldt, W. von (2000) p.59.

⁵⁵ Humboldt, W. von (1960-1981) c.1793-1794, Vol.I p.237, quoted and translated in Lüth, C. (1998) p.46.

⁵⁶ Lüth, C. (1998) p.47.

sides and aligning them as part of his whole'.⁵⁷ In turn, it is by means of forging his individuality out of the process of active contact with the world that man contributes to other men's variety of situations:

the principle of the true art of social intercourse consists in a ceaseless endeavour to grasp the innermost individuality of another, to avail oneself of it, and penetrated with the deepest respect for it as the individuality of another, to act upon it. Because of this respect one can do this only by, as it were, showing oneself, and offering the other the opportunity of comparison.⁵⁸

Humboldt regarded educational institutions as the most favourable environments for the free and critical interaction with the outer world required for *Bildung* to succeed. Schools, and especially universities, were the best places for students to interact with a variety of social relations. He wished schools to be attended by students from all social backgrounds: 'The organization of the schools pay heed to no caste, to no single corporation, and not even to the scholar', he wrote.⁵⁹ At a university level, the community was expected to devote itself to learning through the free interaction with peers in an environment of variety and individualities where one's energies were given full rein.⁶⁰ This interaction between the self and the outside world presupposes liberty: only in a state of freedom can men develop their individuality through the process of interaction.⁶¹ For this reason in *Limits of State Power* Humboldt advocated limiting state intervention in education to the minimum. For Humboldt energy is 'the first and unique virtue of mankind'.⁶² The successful development of an individual depends on 'finding appropriate outlets for his energy so that he can engage in activity by means of which he realizes his potentialities and increases his abilities'.⁶³ Freedom is the essential condition for the channelling of energy and the optimum development of capacities.⁶⁴ In order for man to freely engage with other individuals and with the outer world, *Bildung* has to be protected from social

⁵⁷ Humboldt, W. von (1960-1981) 1797, Vol.I p.346, quoted and translated in Lüth, C. (1998) p.53.

⁵⁸ Humboldt, W. von (1993) pp.27-28.

⁵⁹ Humboldt, W. von (1903-1920) [unknown title], reprinted in Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (eds) *Wilhelm von Humboldts Gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin: B. Behr) Vol.XIII p.188, quoted and translated in Sorkin, D. (1983) 'Wilhelm von Humboldt: The Theory and Practice of Self-Formation (*Bildung*), 1791-1810', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 44 (1) pp.55-73 (p.62).

⁶⁰ Sorkin, D. (1983) p.63.

⁶¹ Humboldt, W. von (1960-1981) 1797, Vol.I p.343, quoted and translated in Lüth, C. (1998) p.53.

⁶² Humboldt, W. von (1993) p.72.

⁶³ Sorkin, D. (1983) p.58.

⁶⁴ Humboldt, W. von (1960-1981) 1792, Vol.I p.64, in Lüth, C. (1998) p.53.

restraints, including state intervention. It is only through a limited control of the state to the community that the diversity of men – human individuality – can unfold.

The ideal of humanity to which *Bildung* aspires requires not only an inner harmony but also harmony between man and the external world.⁶⁵ As noted above, the goal of the *gebildet* man is ‘the maximum formation of abilities and skills into a harmonic whole’.⁶⁶ This inner synthesis is in turn in harmony with society and its *Kultur*. Man cultivates different sides of his person and multiple abilities to, ultimately, act in a harmonious fashion:⁶⁷ ‘in service to the community, in self-restraint and submission to ethical demands’.⁶⁸ Indeed, *Bildung* implies a tension between freedom and order, self-determination and normativity – a question I will address again in subsequent chapters. *Bildung*:

consists of an endless endeavour to reconcile a coherent individuality with the utmost receptivity to the most diverse experience, an acceptance of an eternal tension between the need to be uniquely and harmoniously oneself and the duty to assimilate as much as possible of life’s emotional and intellectual possibilities.⁶⁹

Bildung is ‘a dialectical process, consisting of an endless acceptance and innumerable provisional reconciliations of the creative tension between the individual and his environment’.⁷⁰

According to Humboldt, the *gebildet* man works out his twofold harmonious existence by dint of his capacity for autonomy. Reminiscent of the Kantian free, self-conscious moral agent, it is through the exercise of self-determining thought and action that man comes to make his will ‘free and independent’.⁷¹ Making use of his autonomy, the *gebildet* man undergoes ‘the endless task of developing, unfolding and enlightening the human mind and making real the independence of human will and action from natural and social determinations, coercion and constraints’.⁷²

⁶⁵ Roberts, J. (2009) pp.61-62.

⁶⁶ Humboldt, W. von (1960-1981) n.d., Vol.I p.64, quoted and translated in Nordenbo, S.E. (2003) ‘*Bildung* and the Thinking of *Bildung*’, in Løvlie L., Mortensen K.P. and Nordenbo S.E. (eds) p.32.

⁶⁷ Nordenbo, S.E. (2003) p.32.

⁶⁸ Bleicher, J. (2006) p.365.

⁶⁹ Burrow, J.W. (ed.) (1993) pp.xxix-xxx.

⁷⁰ Ibid, p.xxxi.

⁷¹ Humboldt, W. von (1960-1981) c.1793-1794, Vol.I p.235, quoted and translated in Lüth, C. (1998) p.46.

⁷² Masschelein, J. and Ricken, N. (2003) p.140.

As John Wyon Burrow writes, Humboldt ‘remained sufficiently a man of the eighteenth century to wish to retain the notion of an ideal humanity. He regarded every extension of one’s cultural experience as an enlargement of one’s concept of such an ideal’.⁷³ Humboldt insisted on fostering the diversity of men’s faculties so as to respect their singularity. For, following his belief in the notion of an ideal humanity, he was persuaded that individuality is what leads to the progress of the sciences;⁷⁴ that the vitality of a nation arises from the creative energies of the individual men who constitute it.⁷⁵ For Humboldt, it is by avoiding the risk of total self-alienation that harmonious interaction with the world is achieved. By making reference back to one’s own faculties, the circle is completed, i.e. the extension of the ‘concept of humanity in our person’.⁷⁶

Bildung’s ultimate goal is the achievement of an ideal of humanity. It is a communal effort of humankind achieved through the enhancement of the powers of individuals.⁷⁷ *Bildung* is not a question of the internal development of man only. It is an educational term that combines individuality and sociality: ‘It is a programme of social transformation [humanity] through the formation of individuals’.⁷⁸ It is by virtue of achieving a meaningful existence in interplay with the world that *Bildung* ultimately seeks to improve the collective whole. For, according to Humboldt, the moral appropriateness that man develops enhances not only him but also humanity. In other words, the self-transformation of individuals is translated into a superior society. Ultimate progress is not a simple cumulative achievement but a dialectic one where, through critical interaction, mankind explores a wide range of human potentialities that eventually lead to betterment.⁷⁹ For Humboldt, *Bildung* implies a process of step-by-step development of the individual and of humankind as a whole towards perfection of man and towards progress – although, as a lifelong process, it may remain an incomplete attainment.⁸⁰ For the contingency of the free and varied interaction with the world makes of *Bildung* an unforeseeable and unfinished dialectical

⁷³ Burrow, J.W. (ed.) (1993) p.xxxv.

⁷⁴ Humboldt, W. von (1960-1981) c.1793-1794, Vol.I p.239, quoted and translated in Lüth, C. (1998) p.48.

⁷⁵ Burrow, J.W. (ed.) (1993) p.xxvii.

⁷⁶ Humboldt, W. von (1960-1981) n.d., Vol.I p.238, quoted and translated in Lüth, C. (1998) p.47.

⁷⁷ Lüth, C. (1998) p.57.

⁷⁸ Masschelein, J. and Ricken, N. (2003) p.140.

⁷⁹ Burrow, J.W. (ed.) (1993) p.xxxii and p.liv.

⁸⁰ Humboldt, W. von (1960-1981) 1797-1798, Vol.I p.390, quoted and translated in Lüth, C. (1998) p.53.

process.⁸¹ (In this thesis I will show how Bodichon's self-development does not necessarily lead to social improvement as affecting every social category on an equal basis).

Having outlined how Wilhelm von Humboldt conceptualizes the educational term *Bildung*, next I put forward the epistolary study of Bodichon's self-cultivation I develop in this thesis.

3.3 Bodichon's Epistolary *Bildung*

In her biography Pam Hirsch highlights the significance of reading groups and letter-exchange in providing Bodichon with a rich informal source of learning. Bodichon had access to the family library and to the journals to which her relatives were subscribed. Her father 'did not censor reading and discussion on gender lines'. She and her female friends 'recommended books to each other and critically discussed, either face to face or by letter, everything they had been reading'.⁸² In this thesis I develop further Hirsch's idea of learning through letters as a way of exploring personal correspondence as educational instruments. I propose a conceptualization of the term 'epistolary education' whereby letters acted as educational tools: the act of letter-writing and the cultural practice of letter-exchange turned out to be a rich source of enculturation and self-development for Bodichon (and, as I briefly discuss, for her female correspondents too). In *Becoming a Woman in the Age of Letters*, Dena Goodman develops a conceptualization of the term epistolary education.⁸³ She describes late-eighteenth-century middle-class French women learning the art of letter-writing through manuals, *écrivains* and epistolary conversations with older ladies. Alternatively, my understanding of epistolary education refers to letters as educational instruments: the learning and self-development forged by means of friendship correspondence. As such, epistolary education refers not to teaching how to write epistles but to intersubjective self-cultivation – that is, *Bildung*.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Thompson, C. (2006) p.71.

⁸² Hirsch, P. (1998) pp.32-36.

⁸³ Goodman, D. (2009) *Becoming a Woman in the Age of Letters* (Ithaca, New York and London: Cornell University Press).

⁸⁴ In Goodman's chapter, learning through letters appears only when she refers to learning the art of letter-writing by exchanging letters with ladies.

3.3.1 A Narrative Model of *Bildung*

In this thesis I propose a narrative model of *Bildung*. As discussed in section 3.2., social intercourse plays a pivotal role in the development of *Bildung*. It is through relationships with other people that man is exposed to difference and incorporates it into his sense of self. As Humboldt summarizes:

man is bound essentially to social existence; man needs, quite aside from all bodily and sentiment relationships, for his thinking alone a “thou” corresponding to his “I”. Concepts attain their definition and clarity only by being reflected against the thinking capacity of another.⁸⁵

Resonating with *Bildung*’s idea that man forges his individuality by means of creative interplay with others, narrative approaches to identity argue that individuals carve out their identity through self-narration.⁸⁶ Self-narration acts as a forum where they make sense of their experiences, make them intelligible to themselves and others and, in the process, they forge their individuality. Narratives are spaces that enable individuals to organize, link, and interpret their character, motives, objectives, and circumstances in such a way as to make sense of the experience of living a human life over time. Narratives can be verbally or textually articulated in simple or elaborate structures. (Moving away from *Bildung*’s intersubjectivity, narratives can also be mentally articulated). Narrative self-interpretation is a response to the different perspectival and temporal dimensions of identity. Narrative self-interpretation connects the first-personal perspective to character traits, emotions, beliefs and one’s past and identifies with or distances from certain desires, values and decisions (what some scholars call self-ascription). Through a process of ‘emplotment’, narrative synthesis integrates the different elements of one’s life (actors, motives, places, circumstances) into a meaningful sense of being, establishing connections between one’s character, reasons for action, emotional responses to experiences, and life contingencies for example. In the process, individuals develop a

⁸⁵ Humboldt, W. von (1824-1826) ‘Basics Characteristics of Linguistic Types’, p.380, in Cowan, M. (ed.) (1963) p.65.

⁸⁶ See for example Ricoeur, P. (1988) *Time and Narrative* (Vol.III, translated by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, Chicago: University of Chicago Press); Ricoeur, P. (1992) *Oneself as Another* (translated by Kathleen Blamey, Chicago: University of Chicago Press); Schechtman, M. (1996) *The Constitution of Selves* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press); Velleman, J.D. (2006) *Self to Self: Selected Essays* (New York: Cambridge University Press); Atkins, K. and Mackenzie, C. (eds) (2008) *Practical Identity and Narrative Agency* (New York and London: Routledge).

normative self-conception that brings about the continuity of the self over time and therefore permits the anticipation of future actions. This normative self-conception acts as an authority for each individual since it is the result of his/her active integration of traits, feelings and convictions into his/her sense of self. Narrative integration – dynamic, provisional and open to change and revision – is rendered intelligible within certain norms of personhood. Narratives only make sense as long as they are articulated within the context of broader social, historical, and cultural references shared by interlocutors. These norms of personhood are normative but individuals engage with them in a critical way.

Drawing on narrative approaches to identity (where normative self-conception can be compared to *Bildung's* notion of individuality), in this thesis I propose a narrative model of *Bildung*. My argument is that Bodichon's epistolary dialogues reflect the essence of *Bildung*, i.e. the intersubjective process of self-formation. It is by means of communicating by letter with others that Bodichon not only maintained a reciprocal transformative interaction with them but also articulated her process of self-fashioning – her process of forging her individuality within the heterogeneity of the external world. Following this narrative model of self-cultivation I argue that letters functioned as sites where Bodichon worked out her *Bildung*. That is, she developed her personal and cultural formation during her lifetime – a phenomenon not directly accessible to us (as I will discuss in chapter 4). Simultaneously, she verbalized her self-cultivation via her epistolary narratives, which, as sites for learning, self-reflection and dialogue, fostered her *Bildung*. In other words, in this thesis I argue that, parallel to the act of communicating with family, friends and acquaintances, in letters Bodichon (partially) carved out her individuality. In letters she (partially) acquired her intellectual formation, forged her identity and worked out her autonomy. Letters functioned as forums where Bodichon negotiated a balance between influential input and uninhibited growth. These epistolary phenomena occurred simultaneously and interacted with one another. For analytical purposes, I have divided these phenomena into three dimensions of self-cultivation: knowledge and critical thinking, identity and autonomy – which I develop in chapters 5, 6 and 7. Reading Bodichon's personal correspondence as sources of *Bildung* permits highlighting the significance of letters in Bodichon's personal development, unpacking the intersubjective nature of self-cultivation, and suggesting the simultaneous *Bildung* of her female correspondents. Indeed, as I will further outline in chapter 4, especially the

analysis of the letters *addressed to* Bodichon deepens our understanding of the dialogical unfolding of her subjectivity and her feminism and permits arguing for the parallel self-cultivation of friends such as Bessie Parkes. Letters *about* Bodichon enables Bodichon's *Bildung* to be further assessed.

3.3.2 *Bildung* and the Unitarian Philosophy of Education

Bodichon was born into a particularly progressive Unitarian family, actively engaged in the foundation of several educational institutions. In the late eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth, Unitarians were at the forefront of religious, political and social reform in England. Particularly, improving the provision of education became one of their major efforts. Dissenting academies, boarding and day schools, philosophical, scientific and literary societies, public libraries, as well as Sunday schools and infant schools for the working classes ranged among the alternative educational institutions they set up. At first sight the Romantic and neo-humanist dimensions of *Bildung* seem to be at odds with the rationalistic and to some extent instrumentalist⁸⁷ underpinnings of the Unitarian philosophy of education. Both having firm roots in the Enlightenment and adhering to the belief in a self-improving society, they also share certain assumptions about humanity – though articulated within different frameworks – that make them somewhat akin. In this section I discuss the differences and similarities between *Bildung* and the Unitarian philosophy of education to justify my reading of Bodichon's epistolary education through the lens of *Bildung*.

Bildung and the Unitarian philosophy of education were both informed by the Enlightenment faith in rational knowledge as an instrument of critical thinking and progress. Rejecting the religious dogmatism and rote learning that in their view permeated the educational systems in their respective countries, each proposed an educational programme. They developed a distinct articulation of Enlightenment rationalism though; and each created its educational programme accordingly. In transition from Enlightenment to Romanticism and Classicism, Humboldt found in neo-humanism the holistic educational scheme he hoped

⁸⁷ That is, education understood as a means to train into a career and to achieve some political or social end.

would counterbalance the 'dry' application of the scientific method. He considered that the application of science was accomplishing a great deal 'around us' but improving little 'within us'.⁸⁸ Humanity was not being enriched in spite of technological and scientific advancement.⁸⁹ In *Limits of State Action* he wrote:

When will man finally cease to regard the outward consequences of action with greater esteem than the inward spiritual frame of mind from which they flow; when will someone appear ... who will withdraw the point of vantage from the outward physical results to the inward cultivation (*Bildung*) of men?⁹⁰

Humboldt's conceptualization of *Bildung* combines *Aufklärung* (Enlightenment) with the Romantic cult of feeling; it combines reason, sentiment and aesthetic sensibility. As noted in section 3.2., the *gebildet* man stands for the fusion of intellect and sentiment into one harmonious aesthetic and cultured whole. This harmony stands for the achievement of man's capacity for aesthetic feeling – the imaginative force that binds intellect and feelings into a single whole.⁹¹ Yet, unlike Romanticism's principle of man following his own *Geist* (spirit) and genius as source of inspiration, *Bildung* is a disciplined character-formation and self-reflection form of education that requires the thorough study of literature, arts and philosophy.⁹²

Eschewing Utilitarians' and philanthropists' orientation of education towards usefulness and common benefit, Humboldt's notion of *Bildung* understands education as a process rather than an end in itself and knowledge for its own sake rather than for its practical effects. *Bildung* involved realizing human potential with no definite aims or demands.⁹³ In contrast to Utilitarians' and philanthropists' understanding of human action as a means towards common benefit and overall happiness, for Humboldt individuals are an end in themselves. Self-realization is the highest aim of human existence.⁹⁴ (Below and in section 3.4. I discuss the classist and normative implications of Humboldt's approach). In order to meet this understanding of education and human nature, Humboldt conceived educational programmes based on the Classics, especially the Greeks. He was a

⁸⁸ Humboldt, W. von (1960-1981) n.d., Vol.I p.234, quoted and translated in Lüth, C. (1998) p.45.

⁸⁹ Bleicher, J. (2006) p.364.

⁹⁰ Humboldt, W. von (1903-1920) [unknown title], Vol.I p.75, quoted and translated in Sorkin, D. (1983) p.58.

⁹¹ Roberts, J. (2009) p.v, p.xi, pp-3-4, p.9, p.14, p.52, and p.58.

⁹² Løvlie L. and Standish, P. (2003) p.3.

⁹³ Varkøy, Ø. (2010) p.86 and pp.88-90.

⁹⁴ Roberts, J. (2009) p.11 and p.29.

Hellenist and humanist scholar. During his youth he studied classical philology with his tutors at home and at Göttingen, a centre of neo-humanist revival.⁹⁵ After leaving the Prussian legal and diplomatic service, he acted as a private scholar of humanist philology, aesthetics, philosophy and political theory.⁹⁶ True to *Bildung's* ethos of acknowledging cultural heritage to transform contemporary society,⁹⁷ Humboldt regarded the Greeks not as 'an ideal to be imitated' but as a 'source of inspiration to create new individuality in the present'.⁹⁸ The idea was to transform the present inspired by the great ideal of antiquity.⁹⁹ In Humboldt's own words:

their [the Greeks'] greatness is so pure and true, its origins so genuinely rooted in nature and humanity, that they move us, not with compulsion to be more like them, but with inspiration to be more ourselves. They attract us because they heighten our independence and relate themselves to us only in the idea of ultimate perfection of which they are an undeniable model, permitting us to work toward it ourselves, although in different ways and by a different route.¹⁰⁰

Bildung requires harmony at two different levels: within man and between man and society. Distancing himself from Gottfried Leibniz's metaphysical presupposition of the pre-established harmony of the universe, Humboldt conceived harmony in society as something to be worked out. According to him, Greeks were the models for the harmonious human totality he sought.¹⁰¹ A pre-established harmony was present in the structure of the city-state in ancient Greece, where person and citizen were one.¹⁰² The political constitution of the city-state guaranteed harmony because the promotion of education through the principle of 'happiness in virtue' resulted in the harmonious development of the individual; that is, his energy was given full impulse and his capacities full rein in harmony of the outside world. Humboldt regarded the Frederician state as the antithesis of the *polis*. Unlike Greek city-states, the state could not be the instrument of harmony. For by monitoring men's well-being, property, and private

⁹⁵ Sorkin, D. (1983) p.57.

⁹⁶ Lüth, C. (1998) p.44.

⁹⁷ Løvlie L. and Standish, P. (2003) p.4.

⁹⁸ Lüth, C. (1998) p.54.

⁹⁹ Løvlie L. and Standish, P. (2003) p.4.

¹⁰⁰ Humboldt, W. von (1807-1808) 'History of the Fall and Decline of the Greek City States', p.188-218, in Cowan, M. (ed.) (1963) p.81.

¹⁰¹ Especially in *On the Study of Antiquity and Especially the Greeks*, published in German in 1793, Burrow, J.W. (ed.) (1993) p.xxxviii.

¹⁰² Sorkin, D. (1983) pp.59-60.

life, it thwarted rather than promoted their personal growth. Rather, it turned them into obedient citizens. For Humboldt, the Prussian educational system had to suit the person rather than the citizen. By educating individuals to develop their unique characters rather than by subjecting them to a stultifying vocational training, the educational system enhances each person, who in turn becomes a productive and contributing citizen. Thus, Humboldt saw in Greek culture an inspiration for the harmony he envisaged between man's inner capacities and between man and his environment. Without ever proposing a definite curriculum, he projected in educational institutions 'a wide range of subjects and competences within a framework established with reference to the Vorbild (model) of the classic languages and authors' – especially the Greeks.¹⁰³ In line with *Bildung's* requirement to explore one's manifold capacities as a way of unlocking human potential, the goal of this curriculum based on the Classics was to provide a general education that respects the individual development of each student's energies – one designed to permit him to explore all his powers and then to cultivate his unique abilities.

For their part, Unitarian educationists also sought a holistic education, albeit one where its axis, the rational and scientific method, was put into practical use. Like Enlightenment rationalists, Unitarians were persuaded that applying scientific methods to all fields of knowledge, including philosophy and religion, would clear a path through ignorance, superstition and unfounded authority.¹⁰⁴ Unitarians had an absolute confidence in progress. They believed that 'society was undergoing a gradual process of liberalisation, leading towards a state of perfect civilisation'. And they regarded 'themselves to be at the forefront of modern improvement'.¹⁰⁵ For Unitarians, rational education was the path towards this social progress. At the same time, like Humboldt, some Unitarians felt that rationalism as the sole method neglected inner spirituality. As Kathryn Gleadle points out, from the 1830s onwards, Unitarian authors such as James Martineau and Elizabeth Gaskell emphasised the importance of imagination and defended a 'theory of action based on inner feelings'. This new school of Unitarianism became influenced by German culture and Romanticism via the translation and

¹⁰³ Bleicher, J. (2006) p.364.

¹⁰⁴ Watts, R. (1998) p.35.

¹⁰⁵ Gleadle, K. (1995) *The Early Feminists. Radical Unitarians and the Emergence of the Women's Movement, 1831-1851* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan) pp.6-7.

promotion of German literature and philosophy in their journals and academies. Particularly influential was the biblical exegesis of the German 'high criticism'. Discrepancies in biblical records were discussed by employing philological methods. For instance, the father of Bessie Parkes promoted biblical criticism by offering to pay Marian Evans (novelist George Eliot) to translate *Das Leben Jesu*, written by the German theologian David Friedrich Strauss.¹⁰⁶ According to Gleadle, German historicist approach to the Bible 'struck at the heart of the Unitarian faith': 'Locke's claim that understanding was an essentially passive phenomenon came under attack as the German philosophers came to posit a definition of reason as the organ of spiritual and imaginative insight'.¹⁰⁷ Resonating with *Bildung's* mystic underpinnings aforementioned, under German influence, God was believed to reside within the individual, which led some Unitarians to favour religion as based on individual perception and feeling. Unitarians were introduced to the works of Fichte, Schelling and Schiller through direct contact (many Unitarians studied in German universities) and via English Romantic poets such as Coleridge and Wordsworth.¹⁰⁸

Unitarians' philosophy of education partially emerged as a reaction against the narrow 'age-old classical education' offered in public and grammar schools as well as in Oxford and Cambridge. Public schools had a reputation for corruption and lawlessness, grammar schools suffered from neglect and poverty and the only two English universities were regarded as having become self-contained and complacent.¹⁰⁹ Parallel to their other religious, political and social reform endeavours, Unitarians set up their own alternative educational institutions, where they projected their understanding of the power of education to stimulate progress.¹¹⁰ The somewhat instrumental rationale that underpinned Unitarian educational establishments, particularly present in their dynamic dissenting academies but also in their home educational practices, was to educate laymen for professions and commercial life. In contrast to *Bildung's* dictum of knowledge for its own sake, Unitarians had a more utility-oriented approach to education.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ Hirsch, P. (1998) pp.59-60.

¹⁰⁷ Gleadle, K. (1995) pp.16-17.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, pp. 17-18.

¹⁰⁹ Watts, R. (1998) p.16.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, p.33.

¹¹¹ Unitarians were closely connected to Utilitarianism. As Watts outlines, they both embraced the tenets of classical political economy; their moral ideas were based on the Enlightenment, advocating practical, scientific reforms based on accurate facts; and they worked on assumptions about 'the

The 'traditional' gentleman's liberal education eschewed practical subjects such as political economy in favour of a classical curriculum, which was regarded as true liberal subjects that broadened the human mind and brought all its facets into play. The activities of trade and commerce were associated with the lower orders of society – below the rank of 'gentlemen'. Instead, in his educational treatises *An Essay on a Course of Liberal Education for Civil and Active Life* (1780) and *Course of Lecture on the Study of History* (n.d.), Joseph Priestley, one of the earliest thinkers and publicists of Unitarian educational reform, advocated the study of practical scientific subjects, accompanied by more traditional subjects, as the 'true' liberal education of a 'gentleman'.¹¹² This more commercial and technical education was designed with a view to enabling future industrialists, citizens and commercial Unitarian men – the future useful heads of a cultured, powerful middle class – to lead economic and scientific progress directed towards society as a whole.¹¹³ Therefore, without fully abandoning the study of classical languages and culture, Unitarians broadened the curriculum by adding other subjects such as English and modern language and literature, history, music, philosophy, law, mathematics, geography, physical education, and, most relevantly, modern and practical science such as chemistry, astronomy, natural science, anatomy, political economy, and engineering.¹¹⁴

According to Watts, Unitarians' motivation in modernizing the curriculum came from their perception of knowledge as power. Priestley argued for an environmentalist approach to education against social determinism that empowered individuals. Following David Hartley's associationist psychology (in turn informed by Locke) and in line with Unitarian rationalism and denial of the doctrine of original sin, Priestley claimed that the context of learning, not innate causes, determined individuals' acquisition and production of knowledge.¹¹⁵

proper leadership of the able and enterprising in the middle class'. They also shared an interest in fostering 'an educated populace' but their 'instrumentalist' approach to education was not identical. They both derived their psychology and thus their environmental and educational views from Hartley (see below) and shared a belief in a self-improving society and the perfectibility of humankind, *Ibid*, pp.110-111. But, although there was some overlapping in membership, overall Unitarians did not draw on Utilitarians' framework of the greatest happiness of the greatest number.

¹¹² Watts, R. (1998) p.39.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, p.59.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.34.

¹¹⁵ Locke's faith in man's ability to reason and his idea that the human mind at birth is a *tabula rasa* informed the educational philosophy developed by Unitarians, especially their trust on rationalism and their belief in the power of the environment to shape the individual, Gleadle, K. (1995) pp.10-

Hence, through adequate instruction and intensive study, individuals could achieve moral, religious and intellectual development. In turn, a liberal and rational education was the means through which they sought to improve society as a whole.

Like Priestley's environmentalism, the anti-essentialism that underpins the notion of *Bildung* can also be read as a reaction against social determinism. As Jan Masschelein and Norbert Ricken succinctly argue:

Based on the theoretical conception of *perfectabilité* as it was developed by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in contrast to and as a transformation of the idea of "perfection", *Bildung* was formulated as a critical principle of education in order to refuse specific and determining expectations of the old and new civil society.¹¹⁶

As an emancipatory project, according to *Bildung*, 'human beings are not determined by their own nature or their metaphysical and religious origin as creatures but by their own practices'.¹¹⁷ Man is not destined by nature; he has to determine himself through his action in interaction with the world.¹¹⁸

Priestley's environmentalism and *Bildung*'s anti-essentialism had potential egalitarian class and gender connotations. For, in both cases, an individual's intellectual capacity is primarily conditioned by his/her educational environment.¹¹⁹ Nevertheless, as Watts claims for Unitarianism,¹²⁰ these educational projects can be interpreted as 'emancipatory' projects that in the end empowered certain sectors of the middle class at the expense of other social categories. For ultimately they became empowering instruments within the middle class to exercise influence in society against the upper and lower classes; and their egalitarian rationale remained within a male-oriented framework that undermined equal education for men and women.

Indeed, both Unitarians and *Bildung* sought to produce a high-minded middle class capable of leadership in an improved society. Underpinning their

11. Locke's 'successor', David Hartley, put forward his theory of the mind, referred to as associationism, in his work *Observations on Man*, Hartley, H. (1749) *Observations on Man* (London: S. Richardson). According to his psychological theory, mental processes operate by the association of ideas – previously formed out of sensations generated from the impression of external objects upon our senses. Hartley's associationist psychology had implications for education in that external stimuli determine the process of thought-production, Watts, R. (1998) p.ix and pp.35-36.

¹¹⁶ Masschelein, J. and Ricken, N. (2003) p.140.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Thompson, C. (2006) p.71.

¹¹⁹ Watts, R. (1998) p.8, p.33, and pp.35-36.

¹²⁰ Ibid, p.38.

covert desire for power, they placed individuality at the core of their philosophy. As noted, *Bildung* conceives progress as emanating from cultured individuals who, using their freedom to pursue self-perfection, contribute to enhancing humanity; and Humboldt defended limiting state intervention as a way of ensuring man's uniqueness to flourish. Progress is to be achieved by fostering spontaneity, not by imposing governmental arrangements. Equally, the environmentalist and Necessarianism rationale that underpinned Unitarian thought stressed the centrality of the individual in the universe. The doctrine of Necessarianism maintained that the universe worked according to laws set in motion by God. Phenomena have a cause traceable to a first cause (God), a chain of cause and effect that terminates in the greatest good of the universe. While natural laws were inevitable, man could, by using the God-given faculty of reason, understand them – as scientists were showing. It is man's duty to understand natural laws and to act accordingly. For in doing so he advanced the divine plan. Properly educated, man's actions were links in the chain of causes and effects of the law of nature. Man is thus master of his own fate through mastery of natural laws.¹²¹ Sharing a belief in the perfectibility of humankind, education was the means through which both educational philosophies sought to improve man and to enhance his uniqueness and, ultimately, to improve society as a whole. Both schemes were imbued with a deep sense of public spirit: they had an ethical dimension according to which individuals develop a morally based meaningful life with a view to enhancing humanity.

In turn, both educational philosophies regarded liberalism as the guarantee for human spontaneity and singularity and hence, progress and betterment. As noted in section 3.2., for Humboldt, progress is achieved by virtue of cultured individuals who exercise their self-determination to forge their individuality. This ideal of humanity can only be achieved if their spontaneity is freed from the cramping effects of governmental direction. (Only in the realm of security can legislation be implemented. For it is the sole guarantee that individuals' rights are not violated).¹²² According to Humboldt, the imposition of large scale changes on the body politic and laws stultifies the spontaneity of individuals, generates conformity and thus, precludes social betterment. Progress is to be achieved

¹²¹ Herstein, S. (1985) *A Mid-Victorian Feminist, Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press) p.5; Watts, R. (1998) p.38.

¹²² Roberts, J. (2009) pp.25-27.

through the promotion of an ideal of humanity – through self-development.¹²³ Articulated within a different framework, Unitarians also defended individuals' freedom of thought, expression and self-development in a liberal state where individual talent, industriousness and entrepreneurship were encouraged. In their defence of individuality within a Liberal mindset, *Bildung* and the Unitarian philosophy of education turned out to be instruments of power, especially in respect of the lower ranks.

In like manner, both *Bildung* and the Unitarian philosophy of education remained within a masculinist standpoint that, in the end, hampered the egalitarian potential of its rationale in terms of gender. As I will discuss in detail in the following section, *Bildung* was virtually a male-oriented educational project. It was conceived as a process of personal growth among men, where women were implicitly relegated to a secondary role: that of nurturing men's self-cultivation. As for Unitarianism, as Gleadle, Watts, Joyce Goodman and Camilla Leach have demonstrated, the provision of education for girls within this religious denomination was better than that of their social counterparts.¹²⁴ An engaging home education shared with male siblings was assured by mothers, siblings, governesses and tutors. In turn, girls' schools run by Unitarians, some of them outstanding for their day, furthered girls' instruction and instilled inquiring habits. Though standards varied, besides reading, writing and accomplishments, Unitarian girls were taught other allegedly male disciplines such as arithmetic, political economy, history, geography, English literature and grammar, philosophy, science, and the classics.¹²⁵ However, in line with the gendered underpinnings of middle-class education outlined in section 3.1., Unitarians' educational philosophy was, though highly progressive for the time, nonetheless gendered. In a context where women were accorded an inferior intellectual capacity, Unitarians contributed to challenging derogatory assumptions about women's abilities by nurturing their intellectual skills through a significantly comprehensive education. Yet, this 'superior' education was essentially conceived within a domestic paradigm, according to which girls were invariably expected to

¹²³ Roberts, J. (2009) pp.12-17 and p.28.

¹²⁴ Watts, R. (1998); Gleadle, K. (1995); Goodman, J. and Leach, C. (1998) 'Catharine Cappe, Unitarian Education and Women's Lives, *Faith and Freedom*, Summer/Autumn, pp.117-128; Leach, C. (2003) 'Quaker Women and Education from Late Eighteenth to the Mid Nineteenth Century', PhD. Thesis, University of Southampton.

¹²⁵ Watts, R. (1998) pp.121-136.

become wives and mothers. While they were not denied intellectual skills and were offered rational instruction, women were nonetheless encouraged to pursue knowledge in light of its subsequent domestic use. As a result, conceived in view of their future social roles, the education provision for middle-class Unitarian girls and women was ultimately limited by gender expectations. Moreover, the harder efforts and larger resources Unitarians put into men's education relegated women's educational needs to a second-rate priority. It was in higher education and adult education that gender inequality within Unitarianism was most obvious – though Unitarians led the women's secondary and higher education movement in the second half of the nineteenth century.¹²⁶ The liberal academies, public libraries and societies they founded were devised for men. Women were either not admitted or were permitted to attend certain lectures only and to use a limited range of facilities as guests.¹²⁷ The unequal treatment women received evidenced the male-oriented nature of the Unitarian educational thought – a philosophy that mixed advanced views on women with nods to traditional conceptions of gendered social roles. As a result, girls and women's education among Unitarians, though superior to that offered in other religious denominations, was deficient in relation to their male counterparts.

For its class and, especially, gender biases, as I will now discuss, applying *Bildung* to a feminist research project is not a straightforward endeavour. In the last section of this chapter I address the theoretical tensions that emerge in my application of *Bildung* to my study of Bodichon's (Unitarian) epistolary education.

3.4 A Critical Revision of *Bildung*

Bildung is a contentious neo-humanist educational concept which is currently receiving new attention, among English-speaking scholars but especially in the German-speaking and Nordic countries. While it is being contested for its classist, normative, and masculinist bias, it is also being reconceptualised as a powerful tool to counterbalance the instrumentalist uses of education in today's context of postmodernity and globalized information societies guided by market economies. The term now occupies a prominent albeit ambivalent role in theories

¹²⁶ Gleadle, K. (1995) pp.24-28.

¹²⁷ Watts, R. (1998) pp.150-154.

of education.¹²⁸ In spite of the problematic underpinnings of this educational term, this thesis reads Bodichon's personal correspondence through a revised understanding of *Bildung* as a way of exploring letters as educational instruments. In this section I address the tensions that emerge when using *Bildung* as a thinking tool in my re-examination of Bodichon.

Originally, *Bildung* was 'conceived as a critical and emancipatory enterprise, i.e. as a process in which human beings became truly free and in which they emancipated themselves from all kinds of power'.¹²⁹ However, as Katharina Rowold writes, 'as it became increasingly associated with a classical secondary and university education, the term *Bildung* acquired an association with social status'.¹³⁰ *Bildung's* at first sight inclusive goal – to enhance humanity through personal self-cultivation – turned out to be a purpose achieved very often at the expense of certain categories of people. As I have already noted, *Bildung* (as well as the Unitarian philosophy of education) can be interpreted as seeking to struggle for power within the middle class and against both the upper and lower strands through educational reform.

Likewise, as noted, for Humboldt, knowledge has value for its own sake and man's self-development is an end in itself. Yet, the universal qualities underpinning this rationale may be interpreted as concealing normative implications. For, inadvertently, it takes for granted a precise understanding of human beings and humanity as well as a particular way of attaining these ideals.¹³¹ Scholars suggest that a culturally embedded education – with its cultural, intellectual, moral inheritance – inevitably has normative, and even teleological, connotations.¹³² As Standish writes, 'Our becoming human depends upon our rising from a natural state through the pre-given body of material – in the language, customs and institutions of our society – that we have to make our

¹²⁸ See for instance Wimmer, M. (2003) 'Ruins of *Bildung* in a Knowledge Society: Commenting on the Debate about the Future of *Bildung*', *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 23 (2) pp.167-187; Bauer, W. (2003); Nordenbo, S.E. (2003); Løvlie L., Mortensen K.P. and Nordenbo S.E. (eds) (2003); Masschelein, J. and Ricken, N. (2003); Wulf, C. (2003); Bleicher, J. (2006); Thompson, C. (2006) Varkøy, Ø. (2010). Schultheis, F., Roca i Escoda, M., and Cousin, P-F. (eds) (2008) *Le cauchemar de Humboldt. Les réformes de l'enseignement supérieur européen* (Paris: Raisons d'agir) debates about the implications of the Bologna Process by making reference to Humboldt's educational stance.

¹²⁹ Masschelein, J. and Ricken, N. (2003) p.140.

¹³⁰ Rowold, K. (2010) *The Educated Woman: Minds, Bodies, and Women's Higher Education in Britain, Germany and Spain* (New York and London: Routledge) p.77.

¹³¹ Masschelein, J. and Ricken, N. (2003) p.142.

¹³² Løvlie L. and Standish, P. (2003) p.6 and pp.10-11.

own'.¹³³ And this reality is imbued with value-laden hierarchical connotations.¹³⁴ That being so, *Bildung*'s insistence on viewing self-cultivation for its own sake ultimately turns out to be an instrument of power where normative understandings of culture are encouraged at the expense of other (popular) cultural values. By the same token, the normative implications of *Bildung* preclude the successful experience of distancing from oneself and one's beliefs to open up to the unknown with a view to broadening mindsets. For in adopting heteronomy one may fail to dismantle its potential embedded prejudices. This is so to the extent that the idea of self-alienation may be regarded as an impossible attainment (a limit in Bodichon's *Bildung* that I discuss in the coming chapters).

In like manner, in the context of the German Enlightenment in which it emerged, *Bildung* was implicitly conceived as a process of personal growth among (western) men. Aagot Vinterbo-Hohr and Hansjörg Hohr argue that a sexist rationale is constitutive to Humboldt's theory of *Bildung*. Humboldt 'argues for a complementary relationship between the sexes in the sense that man and woman represent different parts of a whole and only in love may reach true humanity'. Stressing the complementary roles of the sexes in society implies that women's role in society is defined with respect to men's *Bildung* project: responsible for a mere secondary role, the destiny of women is to aid men's self-development. In this formulation, women's complementary role implies a subordinate status vis-à-vis men's.¹³⁵ This ambiguity is equally present in Humboldt's life. In 1787, while studying at the University of Frankfurt an der Oder, Humboldt founded a short-lived small society along with Henriette Herz, a Jewish *salonnière*. They called it 'Tagendbund' and it consisted of an association for mutual self-improvement. Soon after, they welcomed other members: Dorothea Veit, Karl von Laroche, Karoline von Dacheröden, and Therese Forster among others.¹³⁶ To all appearances, Humboldt's mixed society would suggest that he regarded women as capable and worthy of *Bildung*. Yet, the letters he exchanged with his friends, where he articulated the first thoughts about his theory of *Bildung*, give glimpses of its masculinist rationale. In them, the ennobling influence of women in the

¹³³ Standish, P. (2003) p.vii.

¹³⁴ Varkøy, Ø. (2010) pp.87-88 and p.91.

¹³⁵ Vinterbo-Hohr, A. and Hohr, H. (2006) 'The Neo-Humanistic Concept of *Bildung* Going Astray: Comments to Friedrich Schiller's Thoughts on Education', *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 38 (2) pp.215-230 (pp.223-224).

¹³⁶ Bruford, W.H. (1975) pp.5-9.

process of self-improvement is suggestive of the kind of complementary role attributed to women in helping men's *Bildung* outlined above.¹³⁷

In spite of its problematic underpinnings, in this thesis I propose reading Bodichon's letters through a revised understanding of *Bildung*. As Madeleine Arnot highlights, some feminist scholars have expressed their reluctance to 'service' grand male metanarratives by engaging with male theorists whose work is initially gender blind¹³⁸ – e.g. *Bildung*. They state that male-centred insights cannot be imported into feminist research – whose purpose is precisely the deconstruction of male power. Instead, they claim the necessity to create 'a new language and a new imaginary' free from male and masculinist codes.¹³⁹ Many feminist scholars however have chosen to critically discuss male academics' theoretical frameworks. They consider that creating a new and feminist paradigm can be gainful for feminism and social science theory and scholarship should be encouraged along this line of enquiry. But ignoring the work of male thinkers isolates feminist scholarship within the academic community and is ultimately self-defeating.

Reflecting this attitude, some scholars have focused their investigation on exploring women's negotiation of the male-oriented rationale of *Bildung*. In *The Educated Woman: Lands, Bodies, and Women's Higher Education in Britain, Germany and Spain*, Katharina Rowold explores how the notions of *Bildung*, Wissenschaft (scholarship) and *Kultur* (culture), being 'central to the identity and social standing of the educated middle class', informed feminist debates on women's higher education in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Germany.¹⁴⁰ Rowold argues that, 'opposition to the prospect of the female student built up around the idea of the different roles of men and women in the social organism, and the gendered nature of *Bildung*, scholarship, and culture'.¹⁴¹ Challenging this male-dominated notion of *Bildung*, female supporters of women's higher education (regardless of their particular feminist stance) agreed

¹³⁷ Humboldt to Therese Forster, 1 September 1788, Bruford, W.H. (1975) p.7.

¹³⁸ Arnot, M. (2001) 'Bernstein's Sociology of Pedagogy: Female Dialogues and Feminists Elaborations', in Weiler, K. (ed.) *Feminist Engagements. Reading, Resisting, and Revisioning Male Theorists in Education and Cultural Studies* (London and New York: Routledge) p.117.

¹³⁹ Weiler, M. (ed.) (2001) *Feminist Engagements. Reading, Resisting, and Revisioning Male Theorists in Education and Cultural Studies* (London and New York: Routledge) p.1.

¹⁴⁰ Rowold, K. (2010) p.69.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, p.86.

that 'women had to be *gebildet* – educated in a way that formed their inner selves – for women's difference to come to full bloom'.¹⁴²

Likewise, in Marjanne Goozé's collection *Challenging Separate Spheres. Female Bildung in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Germany*, contributors explore the way German women writers 'negotiated, interrogated, and challenged the gender ideology of separate spheres through their advocacy and representations of female *Bildung*'.¹⁴³ For instance Laura Deiulio, in her chapter 'The Voice of the *schöne Seele*: Rahel Levin Varnhagen and Pauline Wiesel as Readers of Weimar Classicism', examines how the epistolary genre permitted these two well-read German women to disrupt male dominated conceptions of *Bildung*. By discussing the works of celebrated authors in their epistolary dialogues, they became knowledge creators in their own right. As Deiulio writes, 'In particular, the correspondents' citations of the greatest authors of their day, Goethe and Schiller, allow[ed] them to display the kind of fluid, developing cultural knowledge implied in the term *Bildung*'.¹⁴⁴ Their epistolary dialogues consist of 'an exchange of ideas between two friends on equal terms, who are simultaneously negotiating their identities as they move through their lives'. As such, rather than constructing finished belief structures, 'the texts contain fragmentary observations and questions – that is, precisely the fluid cultural knowledge that contributed to *Bildung*'.¹⁴⁵ Consequently, Varnhagen and Wiesel inadvertently challenged the idea that only men can produce knowledge, which fostered among the two friends an individuated 'female' *Bildung*. As I will further outline in chapter 4, this thesis expands Deiulio's examination of letters as forums where a female *Bildung* is articulated by theorizing and highlighting the significance of letters *addressed to* Bodichon as sources of intersubjective self-cultivation and as sources of understanding about her (and her female friends') *Bildung*.

Based on the belief that creating a feminist paradigm and engaging with male theory are two projects that can coexist in feminist scholarship, like Rowold, Goozé and Deiulio, this thesis proposes a critical engagement with the masculinist

¹⁴² Rowold, K. (2010) pp.72-73 and p.98.

¹⁴³ Goozé, M.E. (ed.) (2007) *Challenging Separate Spheres: Female Bildung in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford: Peter Lang) p.11.

¹⁴⁴ Deiulio, L. (2007) 'The Voice of the *schöne Seele*: Rahel Levin Varnhagen and Pauline Wiesel as Readers of Weimar Classicism', in Goozé, M.E. (ed.) p.94.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, p.96.

term *Bildung*. My revised understanding of this concept is articulated around three axes: the principle of autonomy that underpins *Bildung*, *Bildung*'s power implications, and *Bildung*'s idea of the harmonious, complete, and coherent self. Placing my thesis within the renewed interest in this neo-humanist term aforementioned, my suggestion is that this highly charged concept permits Bodichon to be reviewed from a different angle – epistolary education – with the aim of broadening our knowledge of her and exploring letters as informal sources of education. In the remaining section I put forward the conceptualization of autonomy I employ in this thesis and I address the questions of power and self as a harmonious totality – further developed in chapters 4 and 8.

3.4.1 Autonomy

Autonomy is the cornerstone of *Bildung*. Resonating with the Kantian framework to the free and self-conscious moral agent, it is by virtue of individuals' faculty for rationality – moral reasoning and rational choice – that they are able to critically assess reality and to act accordingly – to put their individual thought into self-determining action. Self-cultivation is achieved through reason as long as individuals exercise it uncoerced and unmanipulated. This liberal notion of autonomy has been the object of feminist scholarship criticism.¹⁴⁶ It implies the ideal of an abstract individual, governed by reason and free will, who, deliberating from a detached, impersonal, and universalistic point of view, leads a self-sustaining life. As such, this Enlightenment conception of the subject is inextricably bound up with masculine character ideals and therefore it is inherently masculinist. For, by concealing his specificity, the universalistic individual ends up suppressing coercively different others. Otherwise said,

¹⁴⁶ See for example Meyers, D.T. (ed.) (1997) *Feminists Rethink the Self* (Boulder and Oxford: Westview), especially Friedman, M. (1997) 'Autonomy and Social Relationships. Rethinking the Feminist Critique', in Meyers, D.T. (ed.); Jagger, A.M. and Young, I.M. (eds) (1998) *A Companion to Feminist Philosophy* (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell), especially Friedman, M. (2000) 'Feminism in Ethics. Conceptions of Autonomy', in Fricker, M. and Hornsby, J. (eds); Mackenzie, C. and Stoljar N. (eds) (2000) *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press); Fricker, M. and Hornsby, J. (ed.) (2000) *The Cambridge Companion to Feminism in Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); Orr, D. et al (eds) (2007) *Feminist Politics: Identity, Difference and Agency* (Lanham and Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers); Stone, A. (2007) *An Introduction to Feminist Philosophy* (Cambridge and Malden: Polity).

universalistic rational consciousness is but a characteristically male moral standpoint that hides male bias in its claims to universality and impartiality.¹⁴⁷

In *Self, Society and Personal Choice*, Diana Meyers proposes a theory of personal autonomy that seeks to challenge free will theories of personal autonomy that reduce it to a question of uncoerced choice. She equates personal autonomy with living in harmony with one's self.¹⁴⁸ In order to exercise personal autonomy, individuals require self-discovery ('to know what one is like'), self-definition ('to establish one's own standards and to modify one's qualities to meet them') and self-direction ('to express one's personality in action'). Without self-discovery and self-definition, what appears as self-direction may be disguised heteronomy. Still, self-discovery and self-definition are not a guarantee to autonomous self-direction either because they can be socially influenced.¹⁴⁹ Indeed, there are threats to personal autonomy that may impair it, e.g. 'social pressure, externally applied coercion, internalized cultural imperatives, and individual pathology'.¹⁵⁰ According to Meyers, social interaction – 'the subtle, indeed, hardly noticeable processes whereby people become recognizable members of communities' – is unavoidable.¹⁵¹ Free will – an individual's capacity to free herself from social processes that instil alien desires – is unachievable.¹⁵² We are all the products of our historical and cultural contexts and our desires are determined by them.

Individuals do have the competency to live in harmony with one's self within the rules of social interaction, which may be restraining or empowering. Strictly speaking:

no one can dictate his or her own fate. But, inasmuch as autonomous people are able to match their conduct to their selves within the constraints of the opportunities that circumstances afford and are sometimes able to enlarge their opportunities to suit their selves, they exercise as much power over their destinies as anyone can.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁷ See for example, Code, L. (1991) *What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press); Mackenzie, C. and Stoljar, N. (2000) 'Introduction: Autonomy Refigured', in Mackenzie, C. and Stoljar, N. (eds).

¹⁴⁸ Meyers, D.T. (1989) *Self, Society and Personal Choice* (New York and Oxford: Columbia University Press) p.19.

¹⁴⁹ Meyers, D.T. (1989) p.20.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, p.19.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, p.26.

¹⁵² Ibid, p.27.

¹⁵³ Ibid, p.46.

For the processes of self-discovery and self-definition, though they do not guarantee autonomous self-direction, at least provide the opportunity for self-aware deliberation: to reflect on one's desires and to figure out how best to achieve them. In Meyers' view, 'When people formulate life plans paying attention to their own capabilities, inclinations, and feelings, and when they elect these plans unencumbered by coercive external pressures, their life plans are autonomous'.¹⁵⁴

Self-direction is carried out episodically and programmatically.

Autonomous episodic self-direction occurs when a person confronts a situation, asks what he or she can do with respect to it – the options may include withdrawing from it as well as participating in it in various ways – and what he or she really wants to do with respect to it, and then executes the decision this deliberation yields.¹⁵⁵

In order to direct one's life in the long run (programmatic self-direction) people must ask themselves what type of life they want to live. In order to answer this question, they have to consider 'what qualities they want to have, what sorts of interpersonal relations they want to be involved in, what talents they want to develop, what interests they want to pursue, what goals they want to achieve, and so forth'. The outcome of this process of self-discovery and self-definition is the devising of a life plan.¹⁵⁶ A life plan consists of a combination of desires and ambitions: an activity to pursue, an emotional bond to sustain, a value to advance for example. Individuals work out how best to fulfil their objectives. In turn, this life plan is interwoven with the satisfaction of unanticipated wishes. Life plans are dynamic and subject to revision, always unfolding.¹⁵⁷

Although *Bildung's* autonomy is underpinned by the Kantian model of moral agency, Meyers' definition of autonomy resonates with Humboldt's understanding of harmonious self, where the outer (action) is in accord with the inner (the self):

Everything toward which man directs his attention ... is most closely related with his inward sensations and feelings. ... The more harmonious and at one with himself a human being is, the more freely does his chosen external activity spring from his inner being ...

¹⁵⁴ Meyers, D.T. (1989) p.51.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, p.48.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, p.49.

that is why he blossoms into enchanting beauty when his external way of life can be in keeping with his character.¹⁵⁸

Thus, following Meyers's theorization of personal choices, I understand autonomy as women's capacity to act in accordance with their self-conception (their own sense of self). As such, autonomy can be equated with women's achievement of self-fulfilment. Drawing on feminist scholarship, autonomy here is conceived as 'a matter of degree' – a competence exercised to certain extents, not in absolute terms.¹⁵⁹ Likewise, I understand autonomous agents as driven not only by reason but also by emotions and embodiment – desires of which they may not be aware;¹⁶⁰ and they exercise autonomy through intersubjective relationships,¹⁶¹ determined by social factors (such as class and gender) and life contingencies.¹⁶²

Putting into play this revised understanding of autonomy, in chapter 7, I suggest that, Bodichon (partially) negotiated her exercise of autonomy in dialogue with her correspondents. In other words, parallel to the act of communicating, letters functioned as forums where Bodichon projected an articulation of her struggle for self-determination – here understood as acting in accordance with her evolving sense of self. In Meyers' conceptual vocabulary, letters functioned as forums where Bodichon worked out her self-discovery, self-definition and self-direction – in short, her life plan.

3.4.2 Power

As noted above, *Bildung* has classist and normative connotations. Teasing out the power implications of *Bildung* through Michel Foucault's work, Jan Masschelein and Norbert Ricken claim this educational project to be, not an emancipatory endeavour, but 'a privileged medium through which a certain power apparatus ("un dispositif de pouvoir") has been invested'.¹⁶³ The authors

¹⁵⁸ Humboldt, W. von (1792) 'An Attempt to Define the Legal Limits of Government', pp.111-129, in Cowan, M. (ed.) (1963) *Humanist Without Portfolio: An Anthology of the Writings of Wilhelm von Humboldt* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press) p.45.

¹⁵⁹ Friedman, M. (2000) pp.208-209 and p.220.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, pp.208-209 and p.212; Friedman, M. (1997) p.42; Weedon, C. (2003) 'Subjects' in Eagleton, M. (ed.) *A Concise Companion to Feminist Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell) pp.119-120.

¹⁶¹ Friedman, M. (2000) p.213 and p.217; Mackenzie, C. and Stoljar, N. (2000) p.22.

¹⁶² Mackenzie, C. and Stoljar, N. (2000) p.4 and p.8.

¹⁶³ Masschelein, J. and Ricken, N. (2003) p.139.

argue that ‘the pedagogical/educational sciences in the broadest sense can be analyzed as truth games involved in the formation of actual power relations’. Therefore, as an educational project and thus a form of power, *Bildung* stands for a ‘strategic operation of simultaneous processes of individualization and totalisation in which individuals are integrated in a totality (or sociality) through a specific kind of individuality’.¹⁶⁴ The self is encouraged to affirm itself at the same time that it becomes a ‘particularization of the general’.¹⁶⁵ This particular individuality ‘implies a very specific kind of “interpellation”’. For, as a mechanism of power, *Bildung* establishes ‘the ways in which human beings conduct and govern themselves and others in the light of specific truth games’. That is, *Bildung* establishes ‘a very specific way in which we are addressed as social beings and in which we are supposed to address ourselves and others’. The result is that *Bildung* turns out to be ‘a social programme formulated in a specific historical and social context in which it becomes the key-term of bourgeois society’ and an instrument at the service of its values.¹⁶⁶ On that account, the resulting sanctioned individuality – apparently autonomous – is the effect of a middle-class power apparatus – *Bildung*.

Drawing on Masschelein and Ricken’s line of inquiry, I suggest that Bodichon’s epistolary *gebildet* self illustrates the twofold conceptualization of power proposed by Foucault whereby power is simultaneously oppressive and productive. Bodichon’s epistolary “I” is at the same time an effect of power (it is articulated within dominant (gendered) discursive regimes, as Masschelein and Ricken claim) and the *relais* of power (it contributes to circulating oppressive assumptions about certain social categories). Thus, as I will show in chapters 6, and 7, Bodichon succeeded in challenging this male-oriented educational notion – within discursive fields. However, the subject positions she constructed in her epistolary narratives were articulated within an exclusionary standpoint that turned her claim to her own right to *Bildung* into a privilege granted to some social categories only. In her exercise of ‘power to’ (to pursue intellectual and professional self-fulfilment against gender expectations) Bodichon assumed ‘power over’ (female) Others. As a result, she left these (female) Others out of the kind of autonomous subjectivity she claimed for herself and for other feminist

¹⁶⁴ Masschelein, J. and Ricken, N. (2003) p.142.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, p.148.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, p.143.

subjects. *Bildung*'s requirement to encounter the unknown did not always lead Bodichon to a critical self-assessment or to an open attitude towards difference. Quite the contrary, her claim for her right to personal development against gendered expectations implied an exclusive redefinition of her (feminist) outlook as a result of her encounter with the Other that precluded equality (among women). Bodichon's self-alienation was only partial. For her self-refashioning as effected by travelling was caught in classist and colonialist assumptions (chapter 6). In like manner, her epistolary negotiation of self-determination took place to the detriment of the autonomy of other social categories (chapter 7).

As I will further discuss in chapter 8, Bodichon's epistolary agency reflects the tension between individuality and normativity in *Bildung*, outlined above. This problematic aspect of *Bildung* serves as a tool to unpack the limits and implications of Bodichon's exercise of self-cultivation. A revised reading of *Bildung* that teases out the tension between individuality and normativity through Foucault's twofold understanding of power enables Bodichon's bourgeois and ethnocentric standpoint to be unpacked. In combining *Bildung* with a Foucauldian reading of power, the apparent irreconcilability between *Bildung* and feminism is turned into a productive way of providing a nuanced portrait of Bodichon and of arguing for letters as educational tools – and thus, as sources of female agency.¹⁶⁷

3.4.3 Harmonious Self

As noted in chapter 1 and as I further discuss in chapters 4 and 8, the conceptualization of letters as historical evidence that underpins my epistolary study of Bodichon's *Bildung* is proposed as a contribution to epistemological debates about the production of historical knowledge. My *performative* reading of personal correspondence is proposed as an alternative to self-expressive interpretations of letter-writing – whereby the narrating subject is understood to exist prior to the autobiographical act. Instead, I suggest that Bodichon's

¹⁶⁷ Focusing on a Foucauldian reading of Bodichon's personal correspondence only would not permit exploring letters as educational tools as reading letters through the lens of *Bildung* does. *Bildung* enables highlighting the significance of letters as sources of learning and personal growth. In turn, as discussed in this chapter, *Bildung* (unlike, say, the concept of 'epistolary education') permits exploring the application of male theory in a feminist research project. I combine *Bildung* with a Foucauldian criticism of this term in order to examine letters as educational instruments and to unpack the limits of Bodichon's 'progressive' feminist outlook.

epistolary voice is not an expression of her lived identity – as it is implicit in Bodichon’s biographies and Nestor’s article. Bodichon’s self is (partially) constituted via her epistolary “I” – acting simultaneously to other forms of self-constitution. Furthermore, I suggest that Bodichon’s epistolary “I” does not exactly correspond to her historical “I” (flesh-and-blood Bodichon). Her epistolary “I” stands for her subjectivity as articulated in the epistolary genre – the epistolary self-images she circulated according to the addressees to whom she wrote. Her epistolary narratives are one source of self-formation that operated simultaneously to countless others – e.g. her lived gestures, her public persona as projected in publications and as visually articulated in paintings. As such, epistolary narratives offer a partial, yet insightful, understanding of her agency in forging her *Bildung*.

Interweaving *Bildung* with *performativity* creates an ontological tension between two antagonistic understandings of subjectivity. The modern subject is understood to be a rational, coherent, unified and autonomous self. At the other end of the spectrum, the poststructuralist subject is regarded as a disjointed, incomplete, and elusive self. As I will further discuss in chapter 8, as part of my critical application of *Bildung*, my suggestion is that, contrary to *Bildung*’s understanding of the self as a harmonious totality, the self that emerges from Bodichon dialogues is fragmented, multiple, complex, ever unfolding, and in the end, inconclusive. For her epistolary narratives reveal complementary, overlapping and opposing aspects of her subjectivity and the piecemeal nature of her epistolary archive precludes a complete reconstruction of her subjectivity.

Conclusion

In this chapter I presented the theoretical framework that informs my study of Bodichon. I outlined Wilhelm von Humboldt’s conceptualization of this neo-humanist educational term, I put forward the narrative model of self-cultivation that I propose in this thesis, and I discussed the critical reading of *Bildung* I employ, which I articulated around three axes: autonomy, power, and the harmonious, complete, and coherent *gebildet* self. I first argued that, despite the scope of the literature on the history of women’s education in nineteenth-century England, existing publications tend to focus on the formal provision of education

for women. Wishing to contribute to this scholarship, I outlined that I read Bodichon's personal correspondence through the lens of *Bildung* as a way of exploring letters as informal sources of learning and self-development. Next I argued that I draw on Humboldt's conceptualization of *Bildung*: the lifelong process of becoming cultured by means of an active engagement with the diversity of the world. It is an educational ideal that seeks the personal growth of human beings as a way of improving society and reaching an ideal of humanity. Drawing on narrative models of identity formation, I suggested that I conceive Bodichon's epistolary dialogues as reflecting the essence of *Bildung*: the intersubjective process of self-formation. In order to justify my reading of Bodichon's personal correspondence through *Bildung* I contrasted *Bildung* to the Unitarian philosophy of education and I argued that, despite their at first sight opposed frameworks, the two educational projects are somewhat akin. I concluded the chapter by addressing the tensions that emerge when using such a classist, normative and male-oriented educational term. Following Diana Meyers, I outlined that in this thesis I employ a feminist reconceptualization that understands autonomy as one's capacity to live and act in harmony with one's evolving sense of self. Drawing on Jan Masschelein and Norbert Ricken's view on *Bildung* as a *dispositif de pouvoir*, I argued that Bodichon's epistolary *gebildet* self illustrates Foucault's twofold conceptualization of power – simultaneously oppressive and productive. Finally, I outlined that the ontological tension that emerges when interweaving *Bildung* with *performativity* can be turned into a productive discussion about the production of historical knowledge. Ultimately, in this chapter I suggested that, in spite of its problematic underpinnings, using *Bildung* as a thinking tool permits providing a nuanced portrait of this already studied figure and developing further Pam Hirsch's idea of learning through letters. By exploring personal correspondence as educational instruments, my epistolary study of Bodichon's *Bildung* contributes to the history of women's education in England in the nineteenth century.

Having placed my thesis within relevant literature and having put forward the theoretical framework that informs it, I now turn to examine the methodological approach that underpins my epistolary study of Bodichon's *Bildung*.

4 Methodology

Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the methodology that I employ in my epistolary study of Barbara Bodichon's *Bildung*. In section 4.1 I briefly survey feminist historiography in the last forty years. I argue that today, feminist history is a richly theorized and self-reflexive scholarship that presents a wide range of approaches and methods. In dialogue with these theoretical debates, in section 4.2. I put forward the biographical approach I adopt in this thesis. In this section I first describe the nature and state of Bodichon's archive, putting a special emphasis on her personal correspondence. Next I present the cross-epistemological reading to letters I put into play in this thesis: I put forward my revised understanding of letters as historical sources and I outline the threefold combination of epistolary analysis I use in my examination of Bodichon's epistolary *Bildung*. Ultimately, I argue that using a *performative* reading of letters permits exploring an experimental problematization of letters as historical evidence. At the end of this section I describe the complementary primary sources I occasionally interweave in this epistolary study. The chapter concludes by describing the culture of letter-exchange and the codes of letter-writing as practiced by Bodichon and her correspondents.

4.1 Theoretical Debates in Feminist Historiography

In her historiographical reflection, Judith Bennett calls our attention to the 'eroding relationship between "feminism and History"'.¹⁶⁸ Whereas women's history was both inspiration and part of the feminist agenda in the 1970s, Bennett denounces that present feminism ignores the insights that women's and gender history can provide.¹⁶⁹ Feminist history seems to have broken away from the women's movement. New generations of female historians do not seem to find

¹⁶⁸ Bennett, J. (2006) *History Matters. Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press) p.2.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p.4.

their source of inspiration and encouragement in the feminist movement anymore. Today the women's movement itself seems to have become more 'fragmented, [and] dispersed into specific areas of activism',¹⁷⁰ making it more difficult to recuperate 'a sense of continuous struggle on behalf of women represented as a singular entity'.¹⁷¹ Notwithstanding this apparent gradual schism, forty years of feminist historiography have given place to a 'richly theorized' and 'self-reflexive'¹⁷² scholarship that has shaken traditional androcentric history-writing. Virtually always informed by feminist politics, women's and gender history is now a self-critical practice that presents a wide range of theoretical discourses and methodological frameworks.¹⁷³ In this section I discuss the main theoretical debates that have characterised feminist historiography and in the following section I present the biographical approach to Bodichon following the *Bildung* thread that I develop in this thesis in dialogue with these theoretical insights.

Feminist history was first characterized by an attempt to rescue women from historical oblivion and to understand their historical significance. Both exceptional and ordinary women were recovered as 'subjects and agents in the making of history', decentring the male subject.¹⁷⁴ Efforts were made to explain the mechanisms of patriarchy and to explore the potential of women's culture as explanatory tools. Scholars both denounced women's oppressed condition and emphasized their agency as resisters (and even beneficiaries) of patriarchal structures.¹⁷⁵ As a theoretical framework, patriarchy was criticized by historians such as Sheila Rowbotham and Joan Scott for its antagonistic and static structure, historical variability, and for implying a monocausal theory of women's

¹⁷⁰ Scott, J.W. (2004) 'Feminism's History', *Journal of Women's History*, 16 (2) pp.10-29 (p.13).

¹⁷¹ Ibid, p.13. Scott also comes to the conclusion that there is a schism between women's history and the women's movement.

¹⁷² Morgan, S. (2009) 'Theorising Feminist History: A Thirty-Year Retrospective', *Women's History Review*, 18 (3) pp.381-407 (pp.381-382).

¹⁷³ For a detailed account of the debates that have characterised feminist historiography see Offen, K., Pierson, R.R. and Rendall, J. (1991) 'Introduction', in Offen, K., Pierson, R.R. and Rendall, J. (eds) *Writing Women's History. International Perspectives* (London: Macmillan); Caine, B. and Sluga, G. (eds) (1999) *Gendering European History* (London: Leicester University Press); Davidoff, L., McClelland, K. and Varikas, E. (eds) (2000) *Gender and History: Retrospect and Prospect* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers); Alberti, J. (2002) *Gender and the Historian* (Harlow: Longman); Morgan, S. (ed.) (2006) *The Feminist History Reader* (London and New York: Routledge).

¹⁷⁴ Morgan, S. (2009) p.381.

¹⁷⁵ Bennett claims that 'women have also colluded in, undermined, survived, and sometimes even benefited from the presence of patriarchy', Bennett, J. (2006) p.10.

subordinate position.¹⁷⁶ Alternatively, Nancy Cott among others proposed another theoretical framework based on a supportive and empowering female culture – ‘a source of strength and identity’.¹⁷⁷

The metaphor of the separate spheres was another analytical framework early explored in feminist history. It referred to the spatial restrictions placed upon women in accordance with gender prescriptions, especially in the context of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. But this concept also became the object of contentious debates. Amanda Vickery attacked the assumed correlation between the prescriptive ideology of separate spheres and its actual historical practice, and the metaphor’s chronological and class-based inaccuracies.¹⁷⁸

Second-wave feminist historians¹⁷⁹ tended to take a cohesive women’s identity as paramount in claiming women as historical subjects and agents of change.¹⁸⁰ This unifying historical identity has since been challenged in favour of differences among women on the basis of class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, marital status, body and psychic ableness, world region, and religion for example. The destabilization of this univocal female identity and experience was boosted by lesbian, black and postcolonial women’s history, which denounced the heteronormative, racist, ethnocentric and imperialist underpinnings of first wave-feminism and women’s history. Fighting against what they saw as the heteronormativity of much feminist history, lesbian history opted for conceptualizing the lesbian identity. This theoretical shift had the twofold aim of restoring ‘the lesbian subject to history’ and exposing ‘the ingrained homophobia of dominant patriarchal discourses such as religion, medical science, the law and even feminism itself’.¹⁸¹ Queer theory contributed to reevaluating the term

¹⁷⁶ Rowbotham, S. (1979) ‘The Trouble with Patriarchy’, reprinted in Rowbotham, S. (1983) *Dreams and Dilemmas: Collected Writings* (London: Virago); Scott, J.W. (1986) ‘Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis’, *The American Historical Review*, 91 (5) pp.1053-1075.

¹⁷⁷ Cott, N.F. (1977) *The Bonds of Womanhood: ‘Woman’s Sphere’ in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press) p.197.

¹⁷⁸ Vickery, A. (1993) ‘Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women’s History’, *The Historical Journal*, 36 (2) pp.383-414.

¹⁷⁹ Second-wave feminism refers to the period of feminist activity in the United States and Europe (and also in other parts of the world) from the late 1960s throughout the 1990s. First-wave feminism would include the ‘feminist’ activities before that period, namely from the late 18th century to the early 20th. As I further discuss in section 4.2., informed by feminist historians that highlight the biases of second-wave feminist history, this thesis discusses the limits of Bodichon’s first-wave ‘feminism’.

¹⁸⁰ Morgan, S. (ed.) (2006) p.5.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, p.19.

'lesbian' in favour of more inclusive 'lesbian-like'¹⁸² behaviour, practices and cultures, in an attempt to go beyond the problematic notion of identity and to undercut the dualism heterosexual/homosexual.¹⁸³

Other critiques to essentializing definitions of womanhood and female experience came from black and postcolonial feminisms. In 1984 Valerie Amos and Prathiba Parmar stated that western women's history had failed 'to reach beyond the first patriarchal lesson': based on a unifying (white, middle-class) female experience, it had excluded Other women as traditional history had previously ignored women.¹⁸⁴ By universalizing the historical experiences of women, western feminist historians made invisible the particularities of the majority of the female community. Black and post-colonial women's histories attacked the racist, ethnocentric, and imperialist underpinnings of women's history. Black feminists criticized white women's history for prioritizing gender as the main cause of oppression, thus failing to see how simultaneous forms of oppression (most notably race and class) were affecting other women. Black women challenged the belief that gender formation 'pivots around a simple oppositional binary of male and female'.¹⁸⁵ Instead, the identity of a woman is now believed to be constructed both in contrast to that of men's and 'over and against women of other racial and class-based statuses'.¹⁸⁶ In turn, post-colonial women's historians focused their critiques on feminist studies of white women's place in the British Empire. 'Third World' women pointed out the 'Anglocentrism of both the subject matter and the theoretical approaches' of these narratives.¹⁸⁷ They underlined the racial privileges enjoyed by white women in this context, their intellectual and political participation in the civilizing project of the Empire, and its concomitant ambiguous disregard for indigenous women.¹⁸⁸ Simultaneously, the question of rehabilitating the voice of the female subaltern was debated around the problem of the nature of historical evidence and the 'colonising influence of western epistemological frameworks'.¹⁸⁹ Ultimately, lesbian, black and post-colonial feminism insisted on taking 'difference' as an

¹⁸² Bennett, J. (ed.) (2006), pp.109-127.

¹⁸³ Morgan, S. (2009) pp.390-391.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, p.393.

¹⁸⁵ Morgan, S. (ed.) (2006) p.29.

¹⁸⁶ Morgan, S. (2009) p.394.

¹⁸⁷ Morgan, S. (ed.) (2006) p.30.

¹⁸⁸ Morgan, S. (2009) pp.394-395.

¹⁸⁹ Morgan, S. (ed.) (2006) p.32.

analytical category as a way of making visible the heterogeneity of the term 'women'.¹⁹⁰

Critiques to monolithic definitions of women were also expressed under the influence of poststructuralist theory, which sparked off a heated debate among feminist historians over the impact of the 'linguistic turn' upon our understanding of women as historical subjects. Denise Riley shook the ground on which feminism and feminist history stood by challenging the ontological foundation for women's collective identity. She claimed that the category 'women' does not exist in ontological pre-discursive structures. Instead, it is historically and discursively constructed and inherently relative to other categories that are likewise in constant change.¹⁹¹ For her part, Joan Scott defended arguably the most innovative historiographical shift in feminist history: gender as a signifier of power relations.¹⁹² According to her, exploring gender as a category of historical analysis via deconstructionist methods permits the historian to unpack how sexual difference creates meaning and legitimizes power. This theoretical move from 'a history of subjects to a history of relations'¹⁹³ opened a new methodological framework across disciplines and gave way to the study of men and masculinities from a feminist perspective.¹⁹⁴ Gender has since been regarded as a way of going beyond the 'compensatory'¹⁹⁵ and separatist approach of women's history.¹⁹⁶ This refiguring of history was believed to have the potential of encompassing 'both women's and men's histories'¹⁹⁷ and studying 'previously neglected relations between human beings and human groups'.¹⁹⁸

Scott's theoretical project laid the foundation for a critical revision of a series of underpinning concepts of women's history such as experience and agency. In her view, women's history was 'at once a highly successful and limiting

¹⁹⁰ Morgan, S. (ed.) (2006) p.15.

¹⁹¹ Riley, D. (1988) 'Am I That Name?' *Feminism and the Category of 'Women' in History* (London: Macmillan) pp.1-2.

¹⁹² Most notably Scott, J.W. (1986); Scott, J.W. (1991) 'The Evidence of Experience', *Critical Inquiry*, 17 (4) pp.773-797; Scott, J.W. (1988) *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press).

¹⁹³ Morgan, S. (ed.) (2006) p.11.

¹⁹⁴ Purvis, J. and Weatherill, A. (1997) 'Playing the Gender History Game: A Reply to Penelope J. Corfield', *Rethinking History*, 3 (3) pp.333-338 (p.335).

¹⁹⁵ Lerner, G. (1979) *The Majority Finds its Past: Placing Women in History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) pp.149-150.

¹⁹⁶ Morgan, S. (2009) p.384.

¹⁹⁷ Alberti, J. (2002) p.40.

¹⁹⁸ Bock, G. (1989) 'Women's History and Gender History: Aspects of an International Debate', *Gender and History*, 1 (1) pp.7-30 (p.11).

strategy'. For, while it recuperated women from historical oblivion, it also turned women's experience into a foundational concept. In Scott's eyes, understanding experience as a valid source of knowledge precluded any examination of assumptions and categories and ended up naturalizing difference.¹⁹⁹ Instead, she proposed an examination of the discursive nature of women's experience as a way of analyzing how sexual difference is established. Drawing on poststructuralist theory, Scott understood language not as a mere means of representation of reality but as a system of signification. Hence, experience is not the result of an internalization of an objective reality but the effects of the construction of reality via the linguistic categories available in each historical context. In her eyes, the task of gender historians should not be to interpret women's lives on the basis of their experiences but to tease out the linguistic discursivity of experiences through an examination of discourses.

Feminist historians across the theoretical spectrum welcomed, resisted, and engaged strategically with these poststructuralist historical insights.²⁰⁰ For some, gender history was 'immensely liberating' for it understood sexual difference as a historical creation – and therefore subject to change – and it permitted reshaping the whole project of historical inquiry.²⁰¹ Others responded more circumspectly, regarding poststructuralist practices as long being the stock-in-trade of historical inquiry.²⁰² Under poststructuralism, gender history was feared to become 'a potentially politically paralyzing and intellectually irrelevant exercise for endlessly deconstructing binary oppositions and analyzing myriad representations of cultural forms and discourses – disconnected from material reality'.²⁰³ Ultimately, the use of gender as a category of analysis was regarded by some feminist historians to be a mere 'metaphor for power' that did not account for 'lived and labile' social relations.²⁰⁴ Women's historians also pointed out the disempowering effects of multiple and indeterminate female identities. Putting the emphasis on

¹⁹⁹ Scott, J.W. (1991) pp.776-777.

²⁰⁰ Canning, K. (1994) 'Feminist History after the Linguistic Turn: Historicizing Discourse and Experience', *Signs*, 19 (2) pp.368-404 (p.372).

²⁰¹ Roper, L. (1994) *Oedipus and the Devil. Witchcraft, Sexuality and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (London and New York: Routledge) p.13.

²⁰² Hall, C. (1991) 'Politics, Poststructuralism and Feminist History', *Gender and History*, 3 (2) pp.204-210.

²⁰³ Hoff, J. (1994) 'Gender as a Postmodern Category of Paralysis', *Women's History Review*, 3 (2) pp.149-168 (p.158).

²⁰⁴ Downs, L.L. (1993) 'If "Woman" is Just an Empty Category, Then Why Am I Afraid to Walk Alone at Night? Identity Politics Meets the Postmodern Subject', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 35 (2) pp.414-437 (p.424).

differences among women at the expense of what they have in common seemed to compromise their existence as a historical/political category and to undermine the feminist project.²⁰⁵ Likewise, poststructuralism's tendency to focus exclusively on language, text, meaning and representation to the detriment of women's material reality was criticized for reducing flesh-and-blood women to disembodied linguistic constructions.²⁰⁶

Feminist historians seemed determined to retain certain underpinning categories of women's history which were apparently under threat. While they recognized the need to conceptualize 'experience' – the cornerstone of women's history – they insisted on asserting its validity as a source of knowledge²⁰⁷ so that women could be brought 'back into feminist women's history'.²⁰⁸ Informed by poststructuralism, women's historians acknowledged that experience is culturally constituted. But, having problematised discursivity, they defended the relevance of interpretative analysis for investigating women's experiences and the material forces that shaped their lives.²⁰⁹ As Laura Lee Downs stated, unveiling women's experience was compatible with examining 'the process whereby that difference was constituted'.²¹⁰ For 'Finding out about women's daily experiences and therefore where possible finding women's own words in the past' was a critical aspect of feminist history²¹¹ that revealed the complexity and diversity of their lives – hitherto overlooked in traditional history-writing.²¹²

Similarly, poststructuralist understandings of agency as a discursive effect was regarded as drained 'of any meaning'.²¹³ For subjects seemed immobilized by permeating discourses.²¹⁴ So as to break this impasse, some historians of women suggested analyzing 'the material consequences and the ideological effects not

²⁰⁵ Kelly, L., Burton, S., and Regan, L. (1994) 'Researching Women's Lives or Studying Women's Oppression? Reflections on What Constitutes Feminist Research', in Maynard, M. and Purvis, J. (eds) *Researching Women's Lives from a Feminist Perspective* (London: Taylor and Francis) p.31.

²⁰⁶ Hoff, J. (1994) p.154.

²⁰⁷ Maynard, M. and Purvis, J. (1994) 'Doing Feminist Research', in Maynard, M. and Purvis, J. (eds) pp.5-6.

²⁰⁸ Purvis, J. (1994) 'Doing Feminist Women's History: Researching the Lives of Women in the Suffragette Movement in Edwardian England', in Maynard, M. and Purvis, J. (eds) p.167.

²⁰⁹ Maynard, M. (1994) 'Methods, Practice and Epistemology: The Debate about Feminism and Research', in Maynard, M. and Purvis, J. (eds) pp.23-24.

²¹⁰ Downs, L.L. (1993) p.415.

²¹¹ Purvis, J. (1994) p.167.

²¹² Purvis, J. (1992) 'Using Primary Sources When Researching Women's History from a Feminist Perspective', *Women's History Review*, 1 (2) pp. 273-306 (p.274 and p.297).

²¹³ Gordon, G. (1990) 'Response to Scott', *Signs*, 15 (4) pp.852-853 (p.853).

²¹⁴ Downs, L.L. (1993) p.415.

only of discourses that become hegemonic but also of those that were contested and transformed'.²¹⁵ For, in their view, deconstructionists' exclusive attention to the discourses of the literate and the powerful left open the question of to what extent individuals absorbed prescriptive norms and how they mediated, challenged, resisted or transformed them in the process of defining their identities.²¹⁶ Women's historians such as Mary Maynard, Kathleen Canning and Lyndal Roper also sought to counterbalance the poststructuralist limiting tendency to focus on language and discourses by incorporating materiality, including corporeality, and the psyche as determining factors in the mediation of sexual difference.²¹⁷ In practice, most women's historians opted for a consensual approach that combined 'the concerns of historians of women and historians of gender', aiming to 'maintain the terms of both practices and work toward translating the insights of each into the language and framework of the other'.²¹⁸ Karen Offen, Ruth Pierson and Jane Rendall stated that it was 'through a commitment to continue such an enterprise' that feminist history would 'retain both its political and its intellectual vitality'.²¹⁹

Back in 1994, Joan Hoff feared that 'the current divisions among historians of women over women's versus gender history' were 'counterproductive'.²²⁰ Instead, like Offen, Pierson and Rendall, I suggest that this apparently irreconcilable discord can be turned into a constructive tension and that the imaginative productivity which results from it contributes to keeping feminist history 'a leading site of intellectual innovation'.²²¹ In line with the consensual approaches aforementioned, in this thesis I explore the possibility of conducting feminist historical research from a cross-epistemological perspective that combines poststructuralist insights with 'experience' and autobiographical material (e.g. letters) as sources of knowledge about Bodichon. I do so via a revised understanding of letters as historical evidence and a threefold combination of epistolary analysis to examine Bodichon's articulation of *Bildung*

²¹⁵ Canning, K. (1994) p.383.

²¹⁶ Rendall, J. (1991) 'Uneven Developments: Women's History, Feminist History, and Gender History in Great Britain', in Offen, K., Pierson, R.R. and Rendall, J. (eds) pp.51-52.

²¹⁷ Maynard, M. (1995) 'Beyond the 'Big Three': The Development of Feminist Theory into the 1990s', *Women's History Review*, 4 (3) pp.259-281 (p.275).

²¹⁸ Newman, L. (1991) 'Dialogue: Critical Theory and the History of Women: What's at Stake in Deconstructing Women's History', *Journal of Women's History*, 2 (3) pp.58-68 (p.59 and pp.66-67).

²¹⁹ Offen, K., Pierson, R.R. and Rendall, J. (1991) p.xxx.

²²⁰ Hoff, J. (1994) p.163.

²²¹ Morgan, S. (ed.) (2006) p.2.

in her letters. It is to my methodology that I will now turn. Before that, I briefly describe the nature of Bodichon's *epistolarium*.²²²

4.2 An Epistolary Study of Bodichon

In the context of today's heterogeneous feminist history-writing, my study of Bodichon adopts a biographical approach that re-examines this already studied figure through her personal correspondence (namely letters written by her, letters addressed to her, and letters about her). This study revises Bodichon by focusing on the analysis of the significance of letters for her *Bildung*. Judith Bennett recently asked if, by insisting on using biographical approaches, we were not 'in danger of tilting women's history too far back toward women worthies'.²²³ Against this concern, I argue that reviewing Bodichon through the lens of *Bildung* and putting into play a *performative* reading of letters leads to a nuanced understanding of her figure, offers an innovative examination of the potential of letters as informal sources of learning and personal growth, and suggests a problematised conceptualization of letters as historical evidence.

Informed by feminist scholarship that highlights differences among women and points out the limits of first-wave feminism and feminist historiography (aforementioned), in this thesis I discuss the boundaries of Bodichon's 'progressive' feminism vis-à-vis other social categories, including working-class people and native women. I examine how, in her exercise of *Bildung*, Bodichon inadvertently excluded other social groups. In teasing out the classist and ethnocentric underpinnings of her outlook I draw attention to an aspect of her feminism only briefly discussed in Bodichon studies so far, with the exception of Deborah Cherry (as noted in chapter 2). In order to carry out this re-examination of Bodichon, I develop a problematization of the use of letters in historical investigation and I suggest a combination of methods in epistolary analysis. In this section I discuss the methodological elements of my biographical epistolary study of Bodichon.

²²² This term was coined by Liz Stanley and refers to the collection of letters that form the personal correspondence of a subject, Stanley, L. (2004) 'The Epistolarium: On Theorizing Letters and Correspondences', *Auto/Biography*, 12 pp.201-235.

²²³ Bennett, J. (2006) p.24.

4.2.1 Bodichon's Archive

As Cherry highlights, archives are not neutral. They are 'shaped in and by historically specific relations between power and knowledge which have determined who is recorded, when, where and how'.²²⁴ Regarded as a legitimate subject of history, Bodichon's archive is quite extensive. The determination to write women into history has led hosting institutions to acquire documentation about her by gift and by purchase. Her archive consists of personal correspondence, a short travel journal with sketches, family photographs, legal documents, pencil and ink drawings, watercolour paintings, and personal artefacts such as a series of exhibition medals, books from her private library, and a locket containing a strand of her hair.

In this thesis I focus on Bodichon's personal correspondence. Her letters are fragmented and incomplete; many are lost (or purposely destroyed). Letters with date, heading, ending, and without missing pages are the exception. Others are in a poor state – torn, stained with ink, and (partially) unreadable. Reading her letters is additionally difficult due to her very often (seemingly) rushed handwriting and to the frequent absence of punctuation marks. Sometimes only early-twentieth-century typescript copies are available and the originals of some of the letters now in print are no longer extant.

The span of time covered by Bodichon's extant correspondence dates from 1845 to 1891. She engaged in correspondence with family members: her father Benjamin Smith, her aunts Dolly Longden and Julia Smith, her siblings, especially her sisters Bella and Nanny, her 'uncle' Jo Gratton, and her niece Amy; with female friends: Bessie Rayner Parkes, Elizabeth Blackwell, Marian Evans, Emily Davies, Anna Jameson, Mary Howitt and her daughter Anna Mary, Matilda Bentham-Edwards, Gertrude Jekyll, Marianne North, and the Davenport Hill sisters Florence and Rosemund; and with male friends: William Allingham, Gabriel Rossetti, James Buchanan, James Sylvester, and Norman Moore. She also exchanged letters with feminist colleagues: Helen Taylor, Clementia Taylor, Charlotte Manning, Josephine Butler, Frances Power Cobbe, and Emily Faithful; and with acquaintances and political and philanthropic leaders: John Stuart Mill,

²²⁴ Cherry, D. (1993) *Painting Women: Victorian Women Artists* (London and New York: Routledge) p.3 and p.6.

Richard Cobden, Lord Shaftsbury, John Ruskin, Mary Carpenter, and Dorothea Dix. Despite this long list of correspondents, the bulk of her *epistolarium* consists of letters sent *to* her. In this thesis I theorise the use of 'letters to' and I argue that they are pivotal sources of knowledge about the intersubjective nature of Bodichon's (and her female correspondents') *Bildung*. I also draw the attention to the methodological significance of 'letters about' Bodichon in her *epistolarium*. I argue that they permit Bodichon's *Bildung* to be further assessed via an examination of how her epistolary self-image was circulated.

Among Bodichon's correspondents, a particular group of men and women emerge as particularly relevant in my thesis: Bessie Parkes, Anna Mary Howitt, Marian Evans, Anna Jameson, doctors Elizabeth and Emily Blackwell, and William Allingham. The Leigh Smiths and the Howitts made acquaintance in Hastings in November 1845. The eldest of five children, Anna Mary Howitt was born into a Quaker family with a strong literary background. Her father, William Howitt, was an author of newspaper articles and treatises. Her mother, Mary Howitt, née Botham, was a poet and author of literature for children. While living in Germany (1840), Mary Howitt studied Scandinavian literature and learned Swedish and Danish. She subsequently translated works by Frederika Bremer and Hans Christian Andersen. Howitt's parents also pursued a career of joint authorship and acted as editors of their newspaper *Howitt's Journal of Literature and Popular Progress*. The Howitts resigned their membership of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in 1847 and allied themselves with Unitarianism. Later on, they converted to Catholicism.²²⁵

Bodichon met Bessie Parkes in 1846 in Hastings. Parkes was born in Birmingham into a Unitarian family. Her mother, Elizabeth Rayner Priestley, was the grandchild of the scientist and Unitarian minister Joseph Priestley, whose writings were discussed earlier. Her father, Joseph Parkes was a solicitor who supported liberal causes. Parkes was brought up in London, where the family moved when she was 4 years old following her father's career. One year before meeting Bodichon, the Parkes set off on a trip across to Switzerland, Germany and

²²⁵ Hirsch, P. (1998) *Barbara Bodichon: Feminist, Artist and Rebel* (London: Chatto and Windus) pp.21-22.

France.²²⁶ The family settled in Brighton then Hastings in search for a better climate for their son, Priestley, who suffered from tuberculosis.

Parkes and Howitt were acquainted with each other through Bodichon's friendship. In turn, it is through the Howitts and the Parkes that Bodichon became acquainted with Marian Evans and Elizabeth and Emily Blackwell. In the early 1850s Bodichon also met through the Howitts, art critic Anna Jameson, and Irish poet William Allingham, with whom she kept a lifelong friendship correspondence. Nanny and Bella Leigh Smith were also part of this correspondence network. Previously, Parkes first built up her friendship correspondence with former Warwickshire schoolgirls and teacher.²²⁷ Parkes kept up her relationship with her cousin Mary Swainson, her friends Sophia Taylor, Kate Jevons, and her former teacher Lucy Field through correspondence from London, Birmingham, Cradley, Brighton, and Hastings, the places she stayed throughout the year.

In this thesis I discuss a small fraction of Bodichon's vast *epistolarium*. Each of the central chapters focuses on a particular epistolary network relevant to the development of the three aspects of *Bildung* I highlight. In chapter 5 I put into play the first dimension of my understanding of 'epistolary education' by discussing the epistolary network developed between Bodichon, Howitt, Parkes, Elizabeth Blackwell, Jevons and Swainson from 1847 to 1854. In chapter 6 I examine Bodichon's identity as a nomadic Victorian by drawing on letters from/to/about Bodichon, Howitt, Parkes, Jevons, the Leigh Smiths, Dorothy Longden, Evans and her friend Sarah Hennell from 1850 to 1868. In chapter 7 I argue for Bodichon's epistolary negotiation of autonomy by quoting from letters exchanged between Bodichon, Parkes, Howitt, Evans, Jevons, Jameson, William Allingham, Joseph and Elizabeth Parkes, the Blackwell sisters, Caroline Wells Healey, Jo Gratton, James Sylvester, Norman Moore, and Parkes' suitor Robert Fane and her fiancée Sam Blackwell. The timespan covered in this chapter goes from 1846 to the 1880s. These epistolary networks and the letters singled out within them are selected on the basis of their capacity to evidence the dialogical and reciprocal unfolding of the three dimensions of *Bildung* I unpack in this thesis.

²²⁶ Parkes to her cousin Mary Swainson, London, 9 January 1846, Cambridge University, Girton College Archives, Girton College Personal Papers (GCPP) Parkes 3/15.

²²⁷ As I will further discuss in chapter 5, Parkes attended a Unitarian school for middle-class girls in Leam, Warwickshire (1836-1845).

The letter excerpts I discuss stand for the most representative and most illustrative examples of Bodichon's intersubjective epistolary articulation of her *Bildung* (and her female correspondents' self-cultivation). I quote long letter excerpts in order to provide the widest possible contextualization of the narratives. This enables getting a firm grasp of the circumstances in which *Bildung* was worked out and the topics (health, weather, anecdotes, personal updating, expressions of friendship and love) within which it was embedded and which reminds us of the first and foremost communicative purpose of letters.

In England, Bodichon's personal correspondence is located mainly in Girton College (Cambridge University). Other institutions that hold letters to or from Bodichon are the Women's Library (London Metropolitan University), the London School of Economics, the Scott Polar Research Institute (Cambridge), the Cambridge University Library, the National Art Library, the Hampshire Record Office, the West Sussex Record Office, and the London Metropolitan Archives. There are also letters to and from Bodichon in several American libraries: the Schlesinger and Houghton Libraries (Harvard University), the Beinecke Library (Yale University), the New York Public Library, the Butler Library (Columbia University), the Princeton University Library, the Library of Congress, the Stanford University Library, and the Vassar College Library. These English and American institutions also hold letters to and from Bodichon's female friends, related to her and used in this study (letters about Bodichon). As mentioned in chapter 2, some of Bodichon's letters have been published.

4.2.2 A Revised Conceptualization of Letters

Traditionally, letters have been used as straightforward data in historical investigation. More recently, new theorizations of the use of letters in historical research have highlighted their mediatedness. Reflecting current autobiographical theory,²²⁸ letter-writing is now seen as an individual's attempt to create meaning

²²⁸ Spacks, P.M. (1988) 'Forgotten Genres', *Modern Language Studies*, 18 (1) pp.47-57; Etter-Lewis, G. (2000) 'Spellbound: Audience, Identity and Self in Black Women's Narrative Discourse', in Cosslett, T., Lury, C. and Summerfield, P. (eds) *Feminism and Autobiography. Texts, Theories, Methods* (London and New York: Routledge); Stanley, L. (2002) "'Shadows Lying across her Pages': Epistolary Aspects of Reading 'the Eventful I' in Olive Schreiner's Letters 1889-1913", *Journal of European Studies*, 32, pp.251-266; Stanley, L. (2004); Jolly, M. and Stanley, L. (2005) 'Letters as / not a Genre', *Life Writing*, 2 (2) pp.91-118; Tamboukou, M. (2010) *Nomadic Narratives, Visual Forces: Gwen John's Letters and Paintings* (New York: Peter Lang); Tamboukou, M. (2010a) *In the Fold*

of his/her life, 'rather than just reflect or communicate existing truths'.²²⁹ Letter-writing constructs subjectivities not merely represent them.²³⁰ Writing a letter is conceived as a mediated act of self-projection where the writer creates multiple personae determined by the addressees to whom s/he is writing. Letters function as a site of struggle and empowerment where s/he negotiates different subject positions.²³¹ In the words of Elizabeth MacArthur:

Letter writers inevitably construct personae for themselves as they write, and if they are involved in a regular exchange they construct personae for the correspondent and plots for the story of the relationship as well. They become co-authors of a narrative in which they, or rather epistolary constructions of themselves, also play the leading roles.²³²

In line with these new theorizations, drawing on Judith Butler's early theory of gender identity²³³ via Sidonie Smith's notion of *autobiographical performativity*,²³⁴ I conceptualize letter-writing as a *performative* autobiographical

Between Power and Desire. Women Artists' Narratives (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing).

²²⁹ Dobson, M. and Ziemann, B. (eds) (2008) *Reading Primary Sources: The Interpretation of Texts from Nineteenth and Twentieth Century History* (Abingdon: Routledge) p.60.

²³⁰ Stanley, L. (2004) p.211.

²³¹ Spacks, P.M. (1988); MacArthur, E.J. (1990) *Extravagant Narratives: Closure and Dynamics in the Epistolary Form* (Princeton: Princeton University Press); Earle, R. (ed.) (1999) *Epistolary Selves. Letters and Letter-Writers, 1600-1945* (Aldershot: Ashgate); Lyons, M. (1999) 'Love Letters and Writing Practices: On Ecritures Intimes in the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of Family History*, 24 (2) pp.232-239; Montefiore, J. and Hallett, N. (eds) (2002) 'Lives and Letters', *Journal of European Studies*, 32 pp.97-318; Cross, M.F. (2003) *The Letter in Flora Tristan's Politics, 1835-1844* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan); Cross, M.F. and Bland, C. (eds) (2004) *Gender and Politics in the Age of Letter-Writing* (Aldershot: Ashgate); Crangle, S. (2005) 'Epistolarity, Audience, Selfhood: The letters of Dorothy Osborne to William Temple', *Women's Writing*, 12 (3) pp.433-451; Jolly, M. (2008) *In Love and Struggle. Letters in Contemporary Feminism* (New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press); Dobson, M. (2008) 'Letters', in Dobson, M. and Ziemann, B. (eds); Whyman, S. (2009) *The Pen and the People: English Letter Writers, 1660-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

²³² MacArthur, E.J. (1990) p.119.

²³³ In *Gender Trouble*, Butler develops a performative reading of gender identity on the premise, adapted from Nietzsche, that 'there need not to be a "doer behind the deed," but that the "doer" is variably constructed in and through the deed' (p. 195). Following this postulate, she puts forward her thesis of *performativity*, whereby gender is understood to be an effect of incessant reiterated acting. Butler questions 'the fixity of gender identity as an interior depth that is said to be externalized in various forms of "expression"' (p. 202). Instead, she conceives gender identity as a signifying practice that operates through reiteration and constitutes the subject, Butler, J. (1990) *Gender Trouble* (New York and London: Routledge).

²³⁴ Drawing on Butler's theoretical project (1990), Sidonie Smith proposes a *performative* reading of self-narrating as a way of unpacking the implications of the autobiographical project in terms of identity-formation and agency. Smith argues that 'There is no essential, original, coherent autobiographical self before the moment of self-narrating'. In her view, 'autobiographical telling is not a "self-expressive" act' whereby 'self-identity emerges from a psychic interiority, located somewhere "inside" the narrating subject'; nor the self is 'a documentary repository' of experiences 'waiting to be materialized through the text' and 'translated into the metaphorical equivalence in language'. Instead, the interiority (the self) that is said to be prior to the autobiographical expression

act constitutive of the self.²³⁵ Accordingly, letter-writing is not an expression of the self – as it is implicit in Bodichon’s biographies and Pauline Nestor’s article (discussed in chapter 2). Instead, the self-narrating subject is an effect of the autobiographical act; s/he is (partially) constituted through the act of epistolary self-narrating. Writing a letter is an autobiographical gesture that functions as a source of self-formation – operating simultaneously with countless other forms of self-production (for example, the public persona she projected in her publications and the visual self-presentations captured in her paintings). That being so, Bodichon gave written expression to her subjectivity in her letters and this autobiographical gesture acted as another means through which she constituted her self. Bodichon acted out her identity – understood as a multiple intersection of self-identifications – through the signifying practice of letter-writing via her epistolary “I”.²³⁶ She produced her self (partially) by means of this epistolary mechanism in an ever-ending unfolding process.

Parallel to the act of communicating, letters acted as sites where Bodichon articulated and forged her subjectivity. Drawing on poststructuralism’s understanding of experience as a discursive phenomenon and accounting for agency, I suggest that epistolary narratives involved agentic action in the form of discourse reappropriation. In Paul Smith’s conceptual vocabulary, there is an ideological “I” in each autobiographical act that occupies, contests, and revises a range of subject positions. As sites for agency, epistolary dialogues function as forums where historical-bound permeating discourses are reappropriated in the

is ‘an *effect* of autobiographical storytelling’. Smith argues that ‘narrative performativity constitutes interiority’, constitutes the self. Following Butler’s concept of *performativity*, Smith argues that autobiographical storytelling is a performative occasion through which discourses permeate the autobiographical subject by means of reiteration. For Butler, identity is enacted daily through socially enforced norms that surround us. For example, it is through our re-enactment of the norms of masculinity or femininity that we know ourselves to be man or a woman. Based on this postulate, Smith argues that autobiographical storytelling, a performative act of identity-formation, becomes one means through which the narrating subject believes to be a ‘self’, Smith, S. (1995) ‘Performativity, Autobiographical Practice, Resistance’, *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, 10 (1) pp.17-31 (pp.17-19).

²³⁵ Simon-Martin, M. (forthcoming 2012) ‘“More Beautiful than Words and Pencil Can Express”: Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon at the Interface of her Epistolary and Visual Self-Projections’, in Gabaccia, D. and Maynes, M.J. (eds) ‘Gender History across Epistemologies’ (Special Issue) *Gender and History*, 24 (3); Simon-Martin, M. (forthcoming 2013) ‘Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon’s Travel Letters: Performative Self-Formation in Epistolary Narratives’, in Barclay, K. and Richardson, S. (eds) ‘Performing the Self: Women’s Lives in Historical Perspective’ (Special Issue), *Women’s History Review*, 22 (2).

²³⁶ The epistolary “I” is the author who, adopting an epistolary persona, tells the autobiographical narrative in letters, Smith, S. and Watson, J. (2001) *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press) pp.58-63.

process of verbalizing an epistolary self-image. In her textual narratives Bodichon individualized her subjectivity within norms of cultural intelligibility: the autobiographical “I” in her epistolary self-projections is the locus of an agentic engagement with an intersectionality of discourses. Thus, in the process of fashioning her subjectivity, Bodichon engaged critically with discursive traditions, including prevailing notions of bourgeois femininity.

In turn, Bodichon individualized her narrative self-image conditioned by the distinct features of the epistolary genre. Questions of audience, purpose, letter-writing codes, letter-exchange conventions, and conditions of production and reception are some of the factors that delimited/enabled her self-projection. Most notably, the intrinsic presence of the epistolary “you” determined the narrative strategies she adopted via her epistolary “I”²³⁷: from type of paper, handwriting and overall neatness of the letter to the selection of content, tone, and register of the narrative. Bodichon adapted her epistolary narrative to each of her addressees, developing multiple epistolary “I”s. In Butler’s conceptual vocabulary, she *enacted* her identity in accordance with each epistolary “you”.²³⁸ The textual strategies she deployed consisted in bringing out certain aspects of her subjectivity and concealing others. That is, Bodichon was constituted by numerous identities: a traveller, a woman, an artist, a philanthropist, an educationist, a feminist, a neighbour, an English citizen, an illegitimate child, a daughter, a wife, a friend and so on. In her epistolary narratives she ‘played’ with these aspects of her identity and presented different combinations and ‘versions’ of them – sometimes these were only subtly distinct. In virtually all her epistolary writing Bodichon wrote in a lively style. Yet, following letter-exchange codes, she adapted the format and tone in which she approached recipients appropriately. To close friends and relatives she wrote in a rather random conversation-like manner, hardly using punctuation marks, and drawing sketches. In her formal letters, she wrote more structured texts, using a neat hand-writing and adding date, greeting, closing and signature. By doing so, she projected nuanced portraits

²³⁷ As dialogical acts, letters intrinsically involve an addressee: the epistolary “you” (narratee or addressee in autobiographical theory). The epistolary “you” in turn becomes the epistolary “I” in the following letter, ‘for the writer and reader roles are interchangeable’, Stanley, L. (2004) p.212. The epistolary “you” normally refers to the second person singular but it can also be addressed to more than one person.

²³⁸ An epistolary “you” could make reference to a group of people. Unless specified, the letter was expected to be read by third parties. This implies that Bodichon bore in mind the practice of collective reading when she adapted her epistolary “I” to each epistolary “you”.

of herself – which reach us today in the form of a manifold (piecemeal) epistolary voice (a question I will discuss in more detail).

In terms of Bodichon's *Bildung*, my suggestion is that Bodichon developed her personal and cultural formation during her lifetime by innumerable daily habits and life choices, like arranging her activities in the day around her private lessons with personal tutors and training under the aegis of renowned painting masters at different stages of her artistic career. This 'lived' *Bildung* is a phenomenon that, I suggest, is not directly accessible to us. Distinguishing flesh-and-blood subjects from their narrating "I", autobiography theorists Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson state that the historical "I" is unknowable. We are certain of its existence because 'there are traces of this historical person in various kinds of records'. But this 'real' "I" cannot be known through autobiographical writing. Instead, 'The "I" available to readers is the "I" who tells the autobiographical narrative' – the narrating "I".²³⁹ Following Smith and Watson, I argue that personal correspondence does not provide direct access to flesh-and-blood Bodichon – how Bodichon 'lived' her *Bildung*, how she acquired education and put it into use during her lifetime. This is one of the limits of letters as historical evidence.

However, her epistolary "I" – narrating "I" in Smith and Watson's conceptual vocabulary – provide hints about how she developed her *Bildung*. That is, simultaneous to her 'lived' *Bildung*, Bodichon acted out an epistolary articulation of her self-cultivation through the signifying practice of self-narrating by means of her epistolary "I" – within norms of cultural intelligibility and determined by the features of the epistolary genre. The self that emerges from these epistolary narratives stands for the self-images she projected to each of her audiences. As noted, as a *performative* mechanism, letters acted as sources of self-formation. Accordingly, Bodichon's circulating self-images disclose her self-constitution. Her epistolary narratives reveal glimpses of how she carved out her *Bildung* – the subject positions she took 'agentically' within discursive fields by means of the enabling features of the epistolary medium. The knowledge we gather through Bodichon's letters (her self-images) does not correspond to Bodichon's 'core self'. It is the partial knowledge of her self-formation to which we have access: Bodichon's *Bildung* as enacted in her letters. This epistolary

²³⁹ Smith, S. and Watson, J. (2001) p.59.

Bildung may not fully correspond to the self-images she projected in other sources of self-formation. But, as letter-writing forms autobiographical acts constitutive of her self, we can presume a correlation between her epistolary “I” on the one hand and otherwise-articulated “I”s on the other. Accordingly, Bodichon’s letters would offer plausible hints about how flesh-and-blood Bodichon lived her *Bildung* – how she fashioned her self-cultivation in lived gestures. At the same time, as I will discuss particularly in chapter 6, Bodichon’s epistolary “I” does not always emerge entirely consistently but in a complementing, overlapping or slightly opposing manner by virtue of the different epistolary “you” to whom she wrote. (Even further tensions would emerge if we contrasted, for example, Bodichon’s self as articulated in her publications and paintings). That being so, a comparable tension can be assumed to exist between her ‘epistolarily’ articulated *Bildung* (her epistolary self-images) and her ‘lived’ *Bildung*.

Epistolary hints are fragmented and incomplete. As Liz Stanley points out, ‘letters do not exist in a textual vacuum’. They are articulated within a community that goes beyond the correspondents and makes reference to a social world known by them and which is not referred to in detail but taken for granted. “[L]ife” goes on beyond the limits of letters’ and this cannot be condensed ‘in a collection of letters, let alone individual letters within it’. And letters are characterized by temporal and spatial interruptions. They ‘are always “unfinished” in the sense of containing gaps, ellipses and mistakes, and also presume a response and thus an “after”’.²⁴⁰ The ‘unsaid’ (because presumed, intentionally not mentioned, forgotten, unreadable or lost) corresponds to a real and once lived reality. Despite the fragmented and incomplete nature of Bodichon’s *epistolarium* and despite letters being partial, perspectival and mediated, my suggestion is that Bodichon’s personal correspondence is a valuable source of knowledge that provides insightful – though not conclusive (as I will discuss in more detail) – understandings of Bodichon’s *Bildung*.

Bodichon’s *Bildung* can be further assessed via an exploration of the multidimensional nature of her identity as articulated in letters to and about her. An examination of how others responded to her projected self-images in letters

²⁴⁰ Stanley, L. (2004) p.221.

addressed to her and in letters referring to her²⁴¹ permit evaluating to a greater extent how Bodichon fashioned her self-cultivation. The bulk of Bodichon's *epistolarium* consists of letters written *to* her and *about* her. I suggest that Bodichon's epistolary "you" and the epistolary "I" present in letters exchanged among her friends function as a parallel source of historical evidence. According to Smith and Watson, the self-knowing element of autobiographical acts 'is relational, routed through others'. According to them 'no "I" speaks except as and through its others'.²⁴² Narrative relationality implies that 'one's story is bound up with that of another'. That is to say, 'Relational narratives incorporate extensive stories of related others that are embedded within the context of an autobiographical narrative'. A close attention to these 'stories' when reading Bodichon's epistolary "you" (that is, her correspondents' epistolary "I") as well as her friends epistolary "I"s in letters not addressed to her but referring to her permits unpacking the intersubjective development of Bodichon's *Bildung*. These additional epistolary narratives are *performative* autobiographical acts constitutive of the self and are subject to the same layers of mediatedness aforementioned; namely, the epistolary "I" is articulated within cultural norms of intelligibility and is determined by the distinct features of the epistolary genre. Ultimately, these other epistolary narratives act as partial, perspectival, and mediated, yet complementarily insightful, sources of knowledge about Bodichon's *Bildung*.

The interaction between 'letters from' and 'letters to' Bodichon implies that, simultaneous to Bodichon's epistolary *Bildung*, her female correspondents also underwent a similar process of self-cultivation. In this sense, 'letters to' (the bulk of Bodichon's *epistolarium*) are methodologically significant. For they enable the intersubjective nature self-cultivation to be unpacked and they permit suggesting the parallel development of *Bildung* by Bessie Parkes, Mary Howitt, and Marian Evans. I briefly discuss these other engagements with *Bildung*

²⁴¹ For example letters exchanged between Elizabeth Blackwell and her sister Emily Blackwell, or Marian Evans and her friend Sara Hennell, where they make references to Bodichon.

²⁴² Referring to published autobiographies, Smith and Watson classify five different kinds of textual others through which an "I" narrates herself: historical others ('the identifiable figures of a collective past' which 'often serve as generic models of identity culturally available to the narrator'); contingent others ('actors in the narrator's script ... but ... not deeply reflected upon'); significant others ('those whose stories are deeply implicated in the narrator's and through whom the narrator understands her own self-formation'); idealized absent others (the abstract addressee the narrative is addressed to); and subject others (the otherness of one's identity), Smith, S. and Watson, J. (2001) pp.64-67.

throughout this thesis, especially as articulated by Parkes. In turn, letters *about* Bodichon enable her *Bildung* to be further assessed. They permit pointing out how Bodichon's self-image resulting out of the process of *Bildung* was reproduced and circulated by correspondents. This third-person dimension of Bodichon's identity – how others perceived and referred to her – broadens our understanding of her place within the community of which she was part.

The truthfulness of epistolary narratives cannot be easily claimed in referential terms; rather, they stand for a perspectival and subjective construction of 'reality'. As noted above, since letter-writing forms autobiographical acts constitutive of the self, we can presume that a correlation exists between the epistolary "I" and the 'lived' "I". The verisimilitude of this collage portrait of Bodichon's *Bildung* can be additionally argued via the 'intersubjective truth' that emerges from her epistolary exchanges.²⁴³ I work on the assumption that what is written on paper makes sense to both parties by virtue of the epistolary pact that binds letter-writers.²⁴⁴ I reconstruct and interpret Bodichon's epistolary portrait on the basis of this perspectival and intersubjective 'truth'.

This 'truth' is additionally mediated. It is the product of our own discursive construction. Drawing on Smith and Watson's notion of narrated "I" ('the version of the self that the narrating "I" chooses to constitute through recollection for the reader'),²⁴⁵ I suggest that the epistolary "I" is not the only source of signification. Rather it is a twofold mechanism of meaning-construction: the intended reader is also a source of meaning-creation of the narrated "I". It is in the addressees' letters to Bodichon or in letters exchanged among Bodichon's friends referring to her that this meaning is inscribed. These epistolary narratives provide a second-person and third-person dimension of Bodichon – an interpretative response to the self-image she circulated and which in turn feed Bodichon's epistolary self-image.

The narrated "I" is vulnerable to further 'authorial loss' due to the interpretations we, external readers, make of it. We read epistolary narratives through the lens of our own subject positions embedded within context-specific

²⁴³ According to Smith and Watson, 'narrator and addressees are engaged in a communicative action' that constructs intersubjective truth, Smith, S. and Watson, J. (2001) p.69.

²⁴⁴ According to Philippe Lejeune, in each autobiography there is 'autobiographical pact' between the narrating "I" and the reader that validates the 'truth' constructed in the act of self-narrating, Lejeune, P. (1975) *Le pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Seuil).

²⁴⁵ Smith, S. and Watson, J. (2001) p.60.

discursive fields. That is, as historians we are not neutral mediators of epistolary voices but attribute nuanced meanings to Bodichon's *Bildung*. Ultimately, my suggestion is that, in spite of the layers of mediatedness discussed in this section, the epistolary narratives that form Bodichon's *epistolarium* can be used as springboard from which to discuss her *Bildung*. Indeed, as I aim to show in chapters 5, 6 and 7, as historical evidence, letters reveal the intersubjective unfolding of Bodichon's subjectivity and feminist outlook. Letters deepen our knowledge about her feminism as articulated in other primary sources such as articles and pamphlets. Letters offer insights about the *development* of her feminist thought (published at particular stages in her lifetime) and (especially via 'letters to') about the dialogical emergence and negotiation of her feminist stance. In putting into play Bodichon's letters from, to and about her, this thesis complements Bodichon Studies and Laura Deiulio's work (discussed in section 3.4.) in that it theorises the use of letters in historical research and highlights the relational nature of subjectivity and the dialogical formation of Bodichon's *Bildung* and her feminist thought.

4.2.3 A Threefold Combination of Methods

Epistolary studies are characterized by rich and varied methodologies. Different types of letters (diplomatic, political, immigrant, mercantile, personal) have been scrutinized in terms of ideas, identities, ideologies, discourses, networks, friendships, gender roles, middle-class culture, letter-exchange culture, immigration patterns, and diplomatic relationships for example.²⁴⁶ In the words of Maire Fedelma Cross, 'Each example of an individual's correspondence creates its own methodology with the possibility of using a combination of empirical observation, postmodern intertextuality and structural synthesis. ... Each set of letters requires a tailor-made analysis'. Reflecting this 'flexibility of approach unparalleled in analytical writing',²⁴⁷ in my study of Bodichon's letters I interweave an analysis of the content and the discourses present in epistolary narratives, based on which I suggest an interpretation of letters as educational instruments.

²⁴⁶ See for example Earle, R. (ed.) (1999); Cross, M.F. and Bland, C. (eds) (2004).

²⁴⁷ Cross, M.F. (2003) pp.61-62.

As discussed in section 4.1., initially feminist historians claimed women's experience as sources of knowledge in order 'to challenge the universality of the "grand narratives" of western history'²⁴⁸ and to criticize 'the false claims to objectivity of traditional historical accounts'.²⁴⁹ Seeking for 'authenticity and accuracy', women's own narratives were prioritized to 'enable women of the past to speak with their own voices'.²⁵⁰ In the early 1990s Scott warned that in this unproblematic approach, 'The evidence of experience works as a foundation providing both a starting point and a conclusive kind of explanation'.²⁵¹ Scott regarded this strategy as ultimately limiting for historians of difference.²⁵² For, paradoxically, it turns experience into a foundational concept and thus naturalizes difference.²⁵³ Aware of its mediated nature, I follow Toby Ditz's conceptualization of experience as the 'moment when people make use of culturally available genres, discourses, and vocabularies in order to make sense of recent actions and situations and to chart a future course'.²⁵⁴ In line with Ditz's definition, Bodichon's letters do not 'simply report experience' but constitute, articulate and create it.²⁵⁵ Letters act as forums where experience is constructed through and mediated by discourses. In turn, this articulation is determined by the conventions of the epistolary genre. Thus, letters are sites for self-reflection where correspondents construct experience 'within the matrix of possibilities and constraints posed by the genre and narrative conventions, symbolic repertoires, discourses, and vocabularies' which they rework in the letters themselves.²⁵⁶ Indeed, letters provide spaces for the individuation of subjectivity.

Aware of the discursive nature of experience, I treat letters as interpretable texts, which I unpack via an analysis of the discourses the letter-writer mobilized in the process of verbalizing her self-fashioning. In chapters 5, 6 and 7, I analyze the discursive subject positions Bodichon (and the other letter-writers I quote in this thesis) took up in her epistolary narratives. My analysis of discourses gains

²⁴⁸ Pierson, R.R. (1991) 'Experience, Difference, Dominance and Voice in the Writing of Canadian Women's History', in Offen, K., Pierson, R.R. and Rendall, J. (eds) p.80.

²⁴⁹ Scott, J.W. (1991) p.786.

²⁵⁰ Pierson, R.R. (1991) p.85 and p.93.

²⁵¹ Scott, J.W. (1991) p.790.

²⁵² Ibid, p.776.

²⁵³ Ibid, p.777.

²⁵⁴ Ditz, T.L. (1999) 'Formative Ventures: Eighteenth-Century Commercial Letters and the Articulation of Experience', in Earle, R. (ed.) p.62.

²⁵⁵ Ibid, p.63.

²⁵⁶ Ibid, p.62.

special prominence in the latter two. As I will argue in chapters 6 and 7, an analysis of Bodichon's ideological "I", that is the discourses she adopted, reappropriated and challenged via her epistolary "I", permits teasing out how she forged her identity in her travel letters and how she built her career as a watercolourist and engaged herself in feminist and philanthropic reformism. Putting into play the notion of narrative relationality, I also analyse the ideological "I" in letters to and about Bodichon.

Bodichon's epistolary dialogues shed light on her agency in constructing her experience in the process of carving out her gendered subjectivity in a society dominated by men. Drawing on Maynard, Canning and Roper's understanding of experience (described in section 4.1.), I suggest that Bodichon constructed her experience by means of her agency, which was in turn conditioned by permeating discourses, social phenomena, material factors and personal traits. Hence, my analysis of the discourses present in Bodichon's epistolary narratives take on board other possible factors that may have impacted on her mediation of sexual difference – most notably her liberal and Unitarian background, her progressive upbringing and her positivism and self-belief.

At the same time, wishing to retain the referential value of letters, I also examine Bodichon's personal correspondence as source of information, which I discuss by means of an analysis of its content. Letters provide valuable information about 'facts' in Bodichon's life that are not present in other primary sources – e.g. official records. As some quotations and footnotes in section 4.3. and in the coming chapters will show, we know about the logistics and cultural practice of letter-exchange, about Parkes' informal education and schooling, about Bodichon's educational activities with her tutor James Buchanan, her reading *Bildung* theorist Goethe, her marital estrangement, and her status as a semi-invalid after the series of strokes she suffered from 1877 onwards exclusively by means of Bodichon's *epistolarium*. As noted above, the 'truth' of these 'facts' is perspectival, subjective and mediated. But, working on the assumption that what is said in a letter is 'true' by virtue of the *performative* nature of letters and by virtue of the epistolary pact that binds letter-writers, I use the information retrieved by means of an analysis of the content in letters to assess the significance of letters in Bodichon's *Bildung*. In this sense, as early

women's history, I retain (autobiographical) material as sources of knowledge about women's experiences.²⁵⁷ An analysis of the content of Bodichon's letters is present in chapters 5, 6 and 7 but is particularly relevant in chapter 5, where I discuss the role of letters in Bodichon's informal education during her young adulthood. The analysis of content in letters is also carried out in the following section – where I describe the culture of letter-exchange as practiced by Bodichon and her correspondents.

Based on my intertwined analysis of the content and discourses present in Bodichon's personal correspondence, I provide an interpretative analysis of the significance of letters in the development of her *Bildung*. Thus, I claim letters as educational instruments and ultimately as sources of agency. In line with women's history, I retain (a revised understanding of) experience as a source of knowledge about Bodichon's self-cultivation. It is by reading Bodichon's letters as forums where she (partially) worked out her *Bildung* that I tease out the limits of her feminist outlook. To conclude this section I now turn to discuss the other primary sources I use in this thesis to complement the use of letters.

4.2.4 Other Primary Sources

My epistolary study of Bodichon's *Bildung* intertwines other primary sources on occasions for illustrative purposes. This complementary material consists of Bodichon's paintings and publications. Painting was Bodichon's main professional activity. She exhibited and sold her work on a regular basis. Her paintings are mainly watercolours and for the most part are landscape pictures of the places she lived and visited. Some pencil self-portraits and sketches of her friends and architectural monuments are also extant. Her landscape pictures are mainly held at Girton College. The Beinecke Library also holds several pencil and watercolour sketches dating from her honeymoon in North-America. According to biographer Pam Hirsch, other paintings are privately collected.²⁵⁸ For illustrative purposes, in chapter 7 I read Bodichon's sketch 'Ye Newe Generation' (c.1850, now in Girton College) as a way of contrasting Bodichon's artistic self as distinctly

²⁵⁷ As noted, experience in this thesis refers to the moment when individuals make sense of reality and their place in it by making use of culturally available discourses. In the case of letters, experience is articulated in epistolary narratives within the conventions of the genre.

²⁵⁸ Hirsch, P. (1998) p.331.

articulated in her epistolary and visual self-projections. In section 7.1. I explore how Bodichon's sketch and letters acted as parallel yet different means through which she constituted her identity as a painter. Like epistolary narratives, visual self-projections are the locus of an individuated subject position articulated determined by the distinct characteristics of the genre, for instance, the conditions of production, the regulatory codes of the artistic canon, the purpose, and the spectatorship. I suggest that her epistolary and visual self-projections reveal nuanced aspects of her artistic self-conception. I propose this comparative line of inquiry as further research at the end of chapter 8.

Bodichon wrote her first 'letters to the editor' in her local newspaper, aged 21. During the 1850s and 1860s she published four feminist pamphlets: *A Brief Summary in Plain Language, of the Most Important Laws concerning Women* (1854), *Women and Work* (1857), *Objections to the Enfranchisement of Women* (1866) and *Reasons for and against the Enfranchisement of Women* (1869). She also wrote more than 30 articles published in newspapers such as *The Leader*, *The English Woman's Journal*, *The Art Journal*, *Macmillan's Magazine*, the *Englishwoman's Review*, the *Pall Mall Gazette* and *Temple Bar*. Some of the most well-known titles are 'Female Education in the Middle Classes' (1858), 'Slavery in America' (1858), 'An American School' (1858), 'Algiers: First Impressions', and 'Middle-Class Schools for Girls' (1860).²⁵⁹ Following an analysis of content outlined above, I occasionally comment on Bodichon's publications and other (very often anonymous) press articles for illustrative purposes. I refer to Bodichon's pamphlets in order to contrast her unfolding subject positions as articulated in letters and her thought as expressed in her works. As noted, by tracing Bodichon's feminism as articulated dialogically in letters, this thesis throws light on the unfolding of her 'progressive' feminist stance. Bodichon's publications most probably arouse comments – addressed directly to her or expressed in a journal review (as I will outline in subsequent chapters). But these comments are far from the kind of interactive feedback letters provided. In this sense, letters, unlike publications, permit highlighting the dialogical development of *Bildung*. For their part, press articles enable her achievements within the artistic and philanthropic communities to be further assessed – a line of inquiry I suggest as future research in chapter 8.

²⁵⁹ See the bibliography at the end of the thesis for a full list of published works.

In chapters 6 and 7 I quote from Bodichon's American letters. These were written during her honeymoon trip as letters addressed to a particular member of her family or in diary format addressed collectively to her father, siblings and most probably her aunt Julia. She sent these letters in groups, as she herself explained. She did so presumably to save on post costs or conditioned by the postal service available wherever she travelled. On her return she tried, unsuccessfully, to compile them for publication. As noted in the previous paragraph, she published a series of articles on slavery and school visiting in America. Her American letters were published in 1972 by Joseph Reed as *An American Diary 1857-1858*.²⁶⁰ Understanding this American 'diary' to be explicitly addressed to a particular set of correspondents and sent by post as if it was a letter, in this thesis I treat this particular set of letters as outlined in the two previous sections.

Likewise, during her trip across France and Spain (1866-1867), Bodichon wrote a series of letters addressed to Marian Evans – sent one by one as she advanced in her journey. The original letters are no longer extant. What is available today is an eighteen-sheet compilation that looks like a manuscript edited for publication. It would seem that, like her American letters, Bodichon wrote these letters with a view to publishing them. A further edited version was finally published in *Temple Bar* as 'An Easy Railway Journey in Spain' in 1869.²⁶¹ Like her American 'diary', understanding Bodichon's Spanish letters as addressed to a particular correspondent, sent following the regular codes of letter-exchange (some of Evans' replies to Bodichon are extant) and unable to contrast the current compilation to the original manuscripts, in this thesis I read this set of letters as outlined above. The same applies to Bodichon's Brittany letters (1861), briefly discussed in section 6.2. Addressed collectively to her family, she published an article based on them in *The English Woman's Journal* two years later.²⁶²

Before I move on to examine the significance of letters in the development of Bodichon's *Bildung*, I conclude the chapter by describing the cultural practice of letter-exchange as it emerges from her *epistolarium*. In the following section I use an analysis of content to examine the social codes of letter-writing and its

²⁶⁰ Reed, J.W. (ed.) (1972) *An American Diary 1857-1858* (London: Routledge and K. Paul).

²⁶¹ Bodichon, B.L.S. (1869) 'An Easy Railway Journey in Spain', *Temple Bar*, 25, January, pp.240-249.

²⁶² Bodichon, B.L.S. (1863) 'Six weeks in la Chère Petite Bretagne', *The English Woman's Journal*, 63 (11), May, pp.188-197.

communicative, bonding and psychological uses with a view to better assessing how the genre determined Bodichon's (and her correspondents') epistolary self-projections.

4.3 The Cultural Practice of Letter-Exchange

I am always rejoiced when I see the *facteur* plodding up the asphodel field, and I rush down to seize the fat packet of papers, books, and letters with great delight.

Bodichon to William Allingham, [July 1862]²⁶³

Writing and reading letters was a common day-to-day activity among mid-Victorian middle-class women. A comprehensive knowledge of the culture of letter-exchange – its logistics, codes, and social and psychological implications – is central to understand to what extent the genre permitted – and conditioned – Bodichon's articulation of her *Bildung*. As the opening quotation evidences, the moment of post delivery was an exciting experience, where epistolary expectations were realized. Most often delivered by postmen twice a day (morning and afternoon posts), letters and notes were also remitted by the family's servants when the recipients lived a short distance from each other. Warning her fiancé of any indiscretion, Parkes once wrote to Sam Blackwell: 'My letters come in at breakfast time, and so are quite public'.²⁶⁴ Bodichon also referred to morning deliveries in Algeria:

I admire it [Bab Azoun, a famous commercial street with archways built in the 1830s] so much I mean to call myself Barbara de Bab Azoun. It's a fact, if you direct that way the postman will bring it in the morning as surely as if it were 5 Blandford Square.²⁶⁵

While away from home, letters were either directed to a temporary address (a hotel or a host's postal address, previously indicated) or were forwarded. Referring to a spa resort where she planned to stay with her mother, who was following a skin treatment there, Anna Mary Howitt once wrote to Bodichon:

On Wednesday I expect to join my dear Mother at Coton in the Elms – where I hope we are both going to be as idle as idle can be – I hear

²⁶³ Bodichon to William Allingham, [July 1862], Allingham, H. and Williams, E.B. (eds) (1911) *Letters to William Allingham* (London: Longmans, Green and Co.) p.77.

²⁶⁴ Parkes to Sam Blackwell, 20 January 1855, GCPP Parkes 9/10.

²⁶⁵ Bodichon to George Eliot, 42 Agha Bab-Azoun, Alger, 21 November 1856, GCPP Bodichon 4/20.

that this Hydropathi[c] Establishment is a regular sort of Castle of Indolence – It will just therefore suit me – I feel as though I had had so much excitement in mind in many ways this year following upon so much in past years that I only long for rest and sleep – I am really very far from well. Our address will be
Graffen House
Cotton-in-the Elms
in Burton-on-Trent
South Derbyshire²⁶⁶

Likewise, warning Bodichon of her change of address, Bessie Parkes once wrote to her:

Dear B,
Please to direct to Liverpool at Mr Jevons, 24 St James Road. I go in a week from hence – Direct this week to Mrs. W. Bonvens [?] as before, I won't bother you with any more houses. I am so sick of visiting.²⁶⁷

There are many references to forwarded letters, like the letter of thank you Marian Evans' husband, John Walter Cross, sent to Bodichon ('Thank you for your letter of last week which has been forwarded to me here [4, Chagne Walk, Chelsea, S.W.] where I have been for a couple of weeks')²⁶⁸ and Anna Jameson's letter to Bodichon enclosing another one addressed to her aunt Julia ('I have had a letter from your Aunt Julia dated from Blandford Sq so I send this to you to be given to her – or forwarded to her').²⁶⁹ Sometimes Bodichon complained about her letters not being properly forwarded to her in Algeria. Writing to her American friend Caroline Dall from London she explained: 'Your letter is dated March 3 but I only received yesterday, it was not forwarded to Algiers'.²⁷⁰

Initially, letters were paid by the recipient, but the implementation of the Uniform Penny Post in 1840 introduced prepaid stamps, paid by the sender. In addition, it abolished the mileage extras, an ordinary letter across the national territory costing the fixed rate of one penny.²⁷¹ 'Your last letter was very cheap for 1 penny (paid by yourself) thanks for I just exactly agree & that is pleasant', wrote

²⁶⁶ Howitt to Bodichon, 31 July [1859] Columbia University, Butler Library, Leonore Beaky, Letters of Howitt to Bodichon, letter 30.

²⁶⁷ Parkes to Bodichon, 13 June 1850, GCPP Parkes 5/44.

²⁶⁸ John Walter Cross to Bodichon, 1 February 1883, GCPP Bodichon 4/13.

²⁶⁹ Anna Jameson to Bodichon, 20 October 1854, GCPP Bodichon 4/18.

²⁷⁰ Bodichon to Caroline Wells Healey Dall, 5 Blandford Square, 21 June [1865], Massachusetts Historical Society, Caroline Wells Healey Dall Papers.

²⁷¹ John, C. (2001) *Oxford Dictionary of British History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) p.522.

Bodichon to Parkes in the late 1840s.²⁷² To her former tutor, James Buchanan, now living in South Africa, she said: 'I wish you had a penny post to the Cape of Good Hope; it is a great blessing to England'.²⁷³ The fixed rate postage did not apply to territories outside Britain but it seems the prepayment option was available: 'Bell tells me ... that it is better not to pre-pay letters to Rome therefore I send my letters unpaid tho' nevertheless with a feeling of dissatisfaction', Anna Mary wrote to Bodichon and her sister Nanny.²⁷⁴ This post service contributed to putting into play the network of friendship correspondence I highlight in this thesis and which, I argue, permitted the stimulation of Bodichon's *Bildung*.

The quotation at the head of the chapter is also illustrative of the possible components of post deliveries. Letters were often accompanied by parcels containing books, newspapers, and presents. In her early twenties Bodichon and her siblings prepared a parcel with objects made by themselves for their former tutor, Buchanan. Bodichon reported to him:

we are packing a box for you and Nancy [his wife?], but most likely this letter will reach you before the box is ready, as there are certain things not quite finished, which Bell and Nanny are working at now. Nanny is trying to copy for you a portrait of Papa and Willy which hangs in the dinning-room. She is considered a good artist, and I hope will succeed. Bell is making a purse which promises to be very pretty indeed.²⁷⁵

In the same way, writing to Caroline Dall from Algeria, Bodichon thanked her for the books she had sent her from America:

Dear Mrs. Dall, I have had one book of yours & acknowledged it as soon as it came – this time last year, just about the time of Mrs. Jameson's death. I have not received the 2nd but it may be awaiting me in England. Will you accept my best thanks & pardon me for not have earlier acknowledged your kind present. I have seen a favourable notice of it in the Athenaeum if I can find it I will send it to you.²⁷⁶

In turn, Bodichon sought to send copies of her feminist newspaper to her American friend: 'Mrs. Parkman's letter from the Wales did not reach me in time

²⁷² Bodichon to Parkes, [1848], GCPP Parkes 5/167.

²⁷³ Bodichon to James Buchanan, 10 October 1848, Buchanan, B.I. (ed.) (1923) *Buchanan Family Records: James Buchanan and his Descendants* (Capetown: Townshend, Taylor and Snashall) p.18.

²⁷⁴ Howitt to Bodichon and Nanny Leigh Smith, 8 January 1855, Beaky, letter 27.

²⁷⁵ Bodichon to James Buchanan, 10 October 1848, Buchanan, B.I. (ed.) (1923) p.17.

²⁷⁶ Bodichon to Caroline Wells Healey Dall, Champagne du Pavillon, Alger, 22 March 1861, Massachusetts Historical Society.

to forward this parcel which I had forwarded – I have a whole set of *English Woman's Journal* for you but no means of sending it'.²⁷⁷

An envelope could also contain enclosed notes and additional letters. To save on the cost of postage, letters to one addressee could include letters to another recipient (a sibling or a friend). At other times letter-writers would include enclosed letters addressed to people whose (temporary) address was unknown, and who happened to be close to the main recipient. Expressing her affection for Anna Jameson Parkes once wrote to American sculptor Hatty Hosmer:

There are things which drive me nearly crazy in Mrs. Jameson's absence. I miss her terribly, being not only very fond of her, but accustomed to rely exceedingly on her judgment in all matters of [unreadable] knowledge of the words & tact. I shall enclose a note for her in the letter for I think you are sure to know distinctly where she is, & you will forward it to her at once.²⁷⁸

Alternatively, short notes were enclosed and addressed to a second recipient due to lack of time to write a whole letter, expecting the main one to be circulated. In 1850 Howitt moved to Germany with fellow artist Jane Benham to train with German muralist and book illustrator Wilhelm von Kaulbach. Writing from Munich, Howitt explained her artistic achievements with Kaulbach to Bodichon through a letter addressed to her mother:

I send Mamma by this post a long account of all which she is to show you – I cannot write it twice ... Pardon this shabby half letter but it is better than keeping it over another day – All the information is contained in Mamma's letter.²⁷⁹

In her study of female letter-writers in the context of France in the second half of the eighteenth century, Dena Goodman describes her women as most often writing in the morning, before or during their toilette, on their writing desk in their private cabinets, alone or in the presence of their maids. Bodichon and her correspondents seems to have written their letters in the drawing-room table, in the morning,²⁸⁰ or at night, before going to bed, presumably in the bedroom

²⁷⁷ Bodichon to Caroline Wells Healey Dall, 5 Blandford Square, 21 June [1865], Massachusetts Historical Society.

²⁷⁸ Parkes to Hatty Hosmer, 30 December 1857, GCPP Parkes 9/32.

²⁷⁹ Howitt to Bodichon, 57 Amalien Strasse, Munich, [25 October 1858], Beaky, letter 13.

²⁸⁰ 'Tuesday morning 10 o'clock', Bodichon to Parkes, [1848], GCPP Parkes 5/167; 'Sunday morning', Howitt to Bodichon, [26 December 1847], Beaky, letter 4.

desk: 'Now I sit writing to you in my night gown; getting cool. ... Goodnight love', Parkes once wrote to Bodichon.²⁸¹ At other times, Bodichon and her friends seem to write timed by the rhythm of postal services ('I only got yours [your letter] this evening at 6, and scribble this line for the early post', wrote once Parkes)²⁸² or seizing a moment of peace, before or after having hosted visiting guests (as Bodichon explained: 'My dear Bessie, I wrote in a great hurry as Dante Rossetti only came as the post was going out').²⁸³ Sometimes the letter was started and finished on different days, interrupted by domestic duties or distractions ('I began this letter a while ago, but now it has come to Sunday, the great letter day of communion with absent friends', once Parkes said to her childhood friend Kate Jevons).²⁸⁴ It would seem that Bodichon and her friends had a specific moment in the day for letter-writing which fitted with their other regular activities (meals, riding, lessons, walks, drawing, and visits). In turn, this pattern was flexible enough to accommodate other occasional recreational activities and duties. It would also seem that they tended to write and read their letters undisturbed in a private setting, though this was not always guaranteed.

Letter-exchange was a cultural practice constituent of middle-class female patterns of daily life and it had its own codes and conventions. Letters were written with quill pens in letter-specific paper or in scraps, which was sometimes a matter of complaint: 'when you write don't write on those unnumbered scraps. It wastes my time so to make them out', protested Parkes on one occasion.²⁸⁵ Sometimes the inner side of the top flap of an envelope (even the whole inside of the envelope) was written over. A sheet of paper could also be written crossed, that is, the letter turned ninety degrees and written over.²⁸⁶ In more formal letters, the written space was limited to one or two sides, without exceeding the writing space by using the margins or parts of the envelope or by resorting to crossed-writing. Personal letters to family and friends and formal businesslike letters sent to influential people differed in content, style and format. Informal

²⁸¹ Parkes to Bodichon, 15 April 1852, GCPP Parkes 5/62.

²⁸² Parkes to unknown recipient, [1848], GCPP Parkes 10/16.

²⁸³ Bodichon to Parkes, [1854], GCPP Parkes 5/173.

²⁸⁴ Parkes to Jevons, 17 April 1850, GCPP Parkes 6/56. Anna Mary Howitt's letters (Columbia University, Beaky) are unusually long and most often include two dates.

²⁸⁵ Parkes to Bodichon, 14 November 1851, GCPP Parkes 5/58.

²⁸⁶ Howitt once wrote a long letter to Bodichon and said: 'I have a deal I should still like to write about dear Barbara – but I know you hate crossed letters', Howitt to Bodichon, [26 December 1947], Beaky, letter 4.

letters could be undated, greeted with a nickname or name initial,²⁸⁷ and ended with an abbreviated closing²⁸⁸ or without it, and include scribbles or sketches, like the following example:

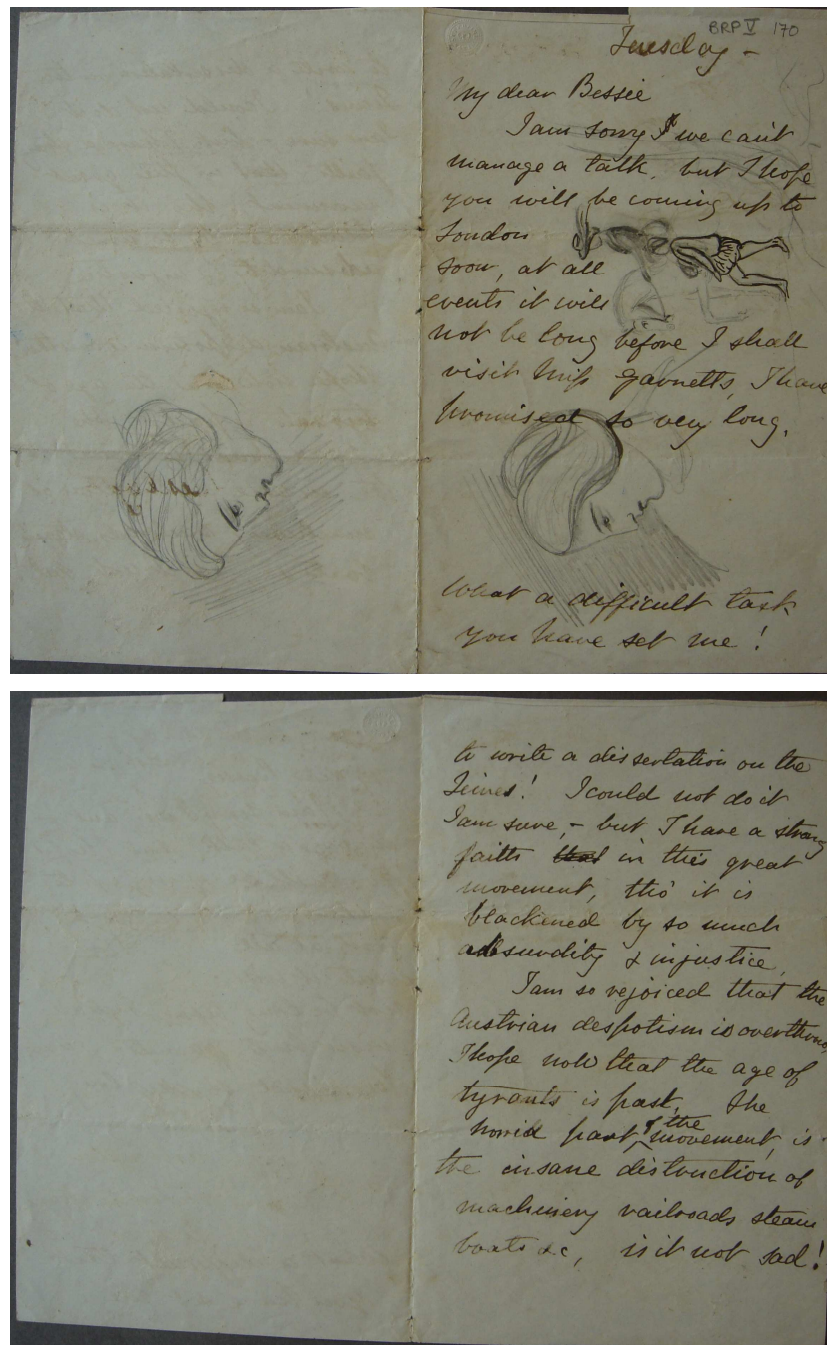


Figure 1: Bodichon to Parkes, [undated], GCPP Parkes 5/170 (The Mistress and Fellows, Girton College, Cambridge)

²⁸⁷ Bodichon referred to Parkes as 'Bess', and Parkes referred to her as 'Barbarossa'. Bodichon was also referred to by her closest friends and family as 'Bar'.

²⁸⁸ For example 'Affly' for 'affectionately', 'Yrs' for 'yours'.

Instead, formal letters tended to be written in a paper with the place or the name of the institution printed, in a clear handwriting. They included a full date, a formal salutation and closing, a neat and structured body, and often the name of the recipient at the end (not in this example though):

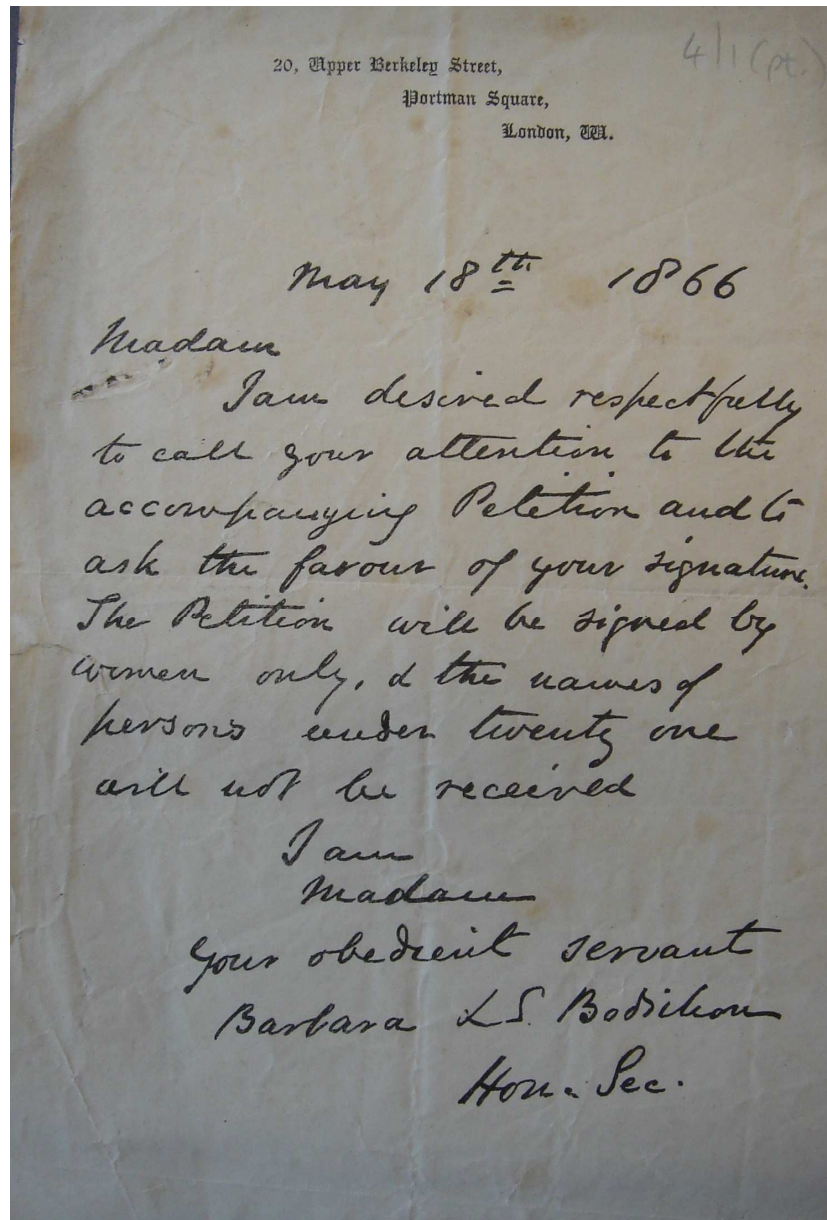


Figure 2: Bodichon to Mrs. Mudie, 18 May 1866, GCPP Bodichon 4/1 (The Mistress and Fellows, Girton College, Cambridge)

Correspondence also included letters of introduction and notes. Letters of introduction served to ask and receive help from third parties and were sent both to the person asking to provide assistance and to the beneficiary of it. An example is the following letter, written by Richard Cobden addressed to Bodichon:

Midhurst 10 dm 1861

My dear Madam Bodichon

Mrs. Morrison with her son & daughter, had determined to pay a visit to Algiers this winter, & I write to introduce them to you & to say that I shall be especially obliged by any kind attention you may be able to show them, or for any friendly advice or warning you may be able to give them in providing a place of residence for the season.

Believe me

Yours truly

Richard Cobden²⁸⁹

Notes were shorter than letters, written in a small piece of paper (sometimes in a small piece of cardboard), usually to send an invitation or an invitation reply, to indicate the day and time for paying a visit, or to inform of having paid a visit and not having found the person at home. Notes tended, but not always, to be delivered by servants (or left by the writer personally). The following is an example of a short note written in a small piece of paper:

22 Church Row Hampstead

Wednesday June 19th 1851

Dear Miss [Barbara Leigh] Smith

I have an engagement in Belgrave Square on Saturday evening at 10 o'clock and in the hope of making my visit at your house a little longer, have the pleasure of accepting your kind invitation to dinner at 7 o'clock.

Believe me

Dear Miss Smith

J. R. Herbert

Miss Smith²⁹⁰

Letters were, above all, a means of communication. Telegraph was used on special occasions only, like in the following situation: 'I conclude you can wait patiently to see his [William Allingham's] verses – which are prettish – till you return ... If you are dying with anxiety – telegraph to me & I will post it instantly' (poet Adelaide Procter to Parkes).²⁹¹ The most common form of written personal communication was correspondence. It served as news conveyor that reached not only the recipient but also people surrounding her. At the death of her brother Parkes informed Bodichon that 'poor Priestley died this morning about 12, calmly at last, but he suffered by much all morning. ... Tell her [Annie Leigh Smith] some

²⁸⁹ Richard Cobden to Bodichon, Midhurst, 10 December 1861, London Metropolitan University, The Women's Library, Papers of Barbara MacCrimmon related to Barbara Bodichon, 7BMC/F/05.

²⁹⁰ John Rogers Herbert to Bodichon, 22 Church Row Hampstead, 19 June 1851, Papers of Barbara MacCrimmon, 7BMC/F/08.

²⁹¹ Adelaide Procter to [Parkes], [1861], GCPP Parkes 8/16.

days hence when she is better'.²⁹² Far from our current understanding of personal correspondence as a private practice, in the context of the mid-nineteenth century, letters were expected to be read aloud or shown around unless otherwise stated. Soon after having met Dr Elizabeth Blackwell in London, Parkes reported to Bodichon:

On Saturday I had a glorious letter from Elizabeth Blackwell. She says: "To my dear friend Barbara, do give my warmest love – her pictures hand daily before me, & I am never weary of looking at the beautiful mountain scenery; and as often as I do so I think of her noble looking nature; & long to hold communion with it once more. Give me always news of her life which means more than actual deed." When we meet I will read you most of her letter.²⁹³

On other occasions the letter was not (partially) transcribed but enclosed in another letter or resent by the recipient to another person. Referring also to Dr Blackwell some years later Bodichon wrote to Parkes:

[M]y dearest Bessie, it is not very often that [I] show letters but I can't help thinking it right to send you this letter of Elizabeth Blackwell for it will touch you deeply I am sure. ... Please send it back to me when you have read it.²⁹⁴

Very often, collective letter-reading was explicitly indicated by using the plural pronouns: 'Do send us word, if you are not too busy' (Anna Mary Howitt to Bodichon).²⁹⁵ The letter-writer could also address the recipient in the plural: 'don't you dear, dear friends, make yourselves unhappy about my health – the very thought and knowledge that I possess in you such dear friends is an increasing thought of peace to me' (Anna Mary Howitt to Nanny Leigh Smith).²⁹⁶ Occasionally, letter-writers specifically asked not to show their letters by indicating 'private' or 'burn it' at the beginning of the letter.²⁹⁷ Letters were also written collectively (the whole letter or parts of it). Writing to Annie Buchanan (James Buchanan's daughter) from Italy, Bodichon explained: 'I send this letter to

²⁹² Parkes to Bodichon, 26 June 1850, GCPP Parkes 5/51.

²⁹³ Parkes to Bodichon, 15 April 1852, GCPP Parkes 5/62.

²⁹⁴ Bodichon to Parkes, 27 December 1861, GCPP Parkes 5/178.

²⁹⁵ Howitt to Bodichon, [late 1840s], Beaky, letter 2.

²⁹⁶ Howitt to Nanny Leigh Smith, 1 October [1854], Beaky, letter 21.

²⁹⁷ Examples of request for keeping the information secret: 'Don't read this to E.T.; she annoyed me painfully, dear soul, by writing to Lucy, against her promise to me', Parkes to Bodichon, 15 April 1852, GCPP Parkes 5/62; 'Private Now my dear', Bodichon to Parkes, [1854], GCPP Parkes 5/172 and Princeton University Library, Janet Camp Troxell Troxell Collection IV Box 14 Folder 1 and IV Box 20 Folder 10.

England by Nanny, who will add a few lines to tell you our last news and post it for me'.²⁹⁸

Letter-exchange was a cultural practice that acted as a means of social networking. It strengthened family and friendship bonds while it delimited their scope by excluding potential recipients.²⁹⁹ In the case of the women described in this study, living apart for the most part of the year, their friendships were fostered and maintained by exchanging letters. Letters were, in the words of Maria Tamboukou, 'a bridge between presence and absence, speech and writing, and act of transgressing space/time boundaries, a discursive technique of safeguarding solitude while sustaining communication, a paradox of the social self'.³⁰⁰ Parkes' words to her childhood friend are illustrative of the force of these epistolary friendships: 'My dearest Kate, Year after year elapses and finds us still corresponding with our pristine vigour, and affording a glorious example to all who sneer at the school friendships of the female sex!'.³⁰¹

Moreover, letters provided women with space for the expression of love and friendship feelings: 'Good night, my dear, sweet Barbara, one of my great causes of happiness also is that God has given me a friend in you – you little know what good the remembrance of you always does me'.³⁰² As a space for (self-) reflexion, letters are full of articulations of emotions, opinions, and personal ambitions – questions I will develop in detail throughout this thesis. Writing to Bodichon at the beginning of their friendship Parkes once confessed to her friend:

I return you your darling letter, I don't know when I have been so much affected by anything. It was just what I wanted. I have [not] been getting any [letter] lately. There is no depth in our domestic life, nothing beyond the surface of every day concerns, & sometimes when I pump I find too little water in any well of hope & Faith; I say this to you alone, don't let anyone else think I feel a deficiency.³⁰³

Likewise, Howitt appreciated Bodichon's cheerful nature and expressed so to her:

²⁹⁸ Bodichon to Annie Buchanan, Sorrento, Italy, 17 May 1855, Buchanan, B.I. (ed.) (1923) p.21.

²⁹⁹ Presumably due to her illegitimate condition, most of Bodichon's Leigh Smith uncles, aunts and cousins did not correspond with her or her siblings. She did correspond though with her aunt Julia, her aunt Patty and her cousins Alice Bonham Carter, Beatrice Shore Smith and Louisa Catherine Shore.

³⁰⁰ Tamboukou, M. (2010) p.15.

³⁰¹ Parkes to Jevons, 8 March 1849, GCPP Parkes 6/52.

³⁰² Howitt to Bodichon, [1848], Beaky, letter 9.

³⁰³ Parkes to Bodichon, [1847], GCPP Parkes 5/2.

Do come, dear, on Sunday for a good long chat – I’ve got my mental hair-shirt of self-torture on – and shan’t I dare say get rid of it till I’ve had a hearty laugh with you – and so have shaken it off.³⁰⁴

Bodichon’s correspondence is also full of anecdotes. Writing to Parkes she explained:

Thanks to Jane Eyre I had a pleasant journey. Otherwise I should have been talked to death by my only female companion, she began instantly “When will the French have another king?” &c “Never” said I to cut her short. She was religiously shocked. “Oh I am sure they will make Lamartine monarch.” &c I had his poems with me, so I thrust them in upon her in a masterly way & stopped her nonsense, & read Jane Eyre all the way without more talk than offering to open & shut the windows & all that. This lady can’t but say that I was infinitely polite, tho’ in fact I was downright selfish & rude³⁰⁵

Likewise, writing at the time of her first trip to Algeria, in 1856, Bodichon amusedly told her friend:

Tuesday 20th This morning at ½ past 5 the commons sounded the little quiet we had at intervals ceased entirely & the bustle of the day began. I was very hungry & bethought one of the sponge cakes left on the mantelpiece from the supper last night. I began to eat when to my horror I saw the cake was covered with insects white & brown. I must have eaten a worm. I could not help laughing but B[ella] & N[anny] were in a state of fear & I began to fear I had eaten something poisonous, perhaps centipedes.³⁰⁶

The act of displaying and sharing one’s thoughts and feelings could be felt as a need and a relief, thus letter-writing being a kind of psychological therapy. Early in their friendship Howitt confessed to Bodichon:

Some way after leaving you I always feel a strong desire for a few more “last words” – your memory always clings to me, and every now and then I wake up from my painting with the consciousness of some joyful experience just past – and therefore I cannot resist before going to bed tonight the pleasure of a little bit more chat with you if it be only on paper.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁴ Howitt to Bodichon, [November 1854], Beaky, letter 23.

³⁰⁵ Bodichon to Parkes, [late 1840s], GCPP Parkes 5/166

³⁰⁶ Bodichon to Parkes, [Algeria], [1856], GCPP Parkes 6/175.

³⁰⁷ Howitt to Bodichon, [1848], Beaky, letter 7.

Likewise, after having expressed her fears about the financial difficulties of her parents, Howitt said to Bodichon: 'The very fact of having written this to you has done me good'.³⁰⁸

Moreover, the fact of giving oneself the time and space to be 'self-centred' by talking about one's concerns was a pleasurable means of learning about oneself³⁰⁹ and gaining self-confidence – a question I will discuss in chapter 5, 6, and 7. In turn, replies were full of advice and words of sympathy, making letters a reliable and trustful source of understanding, support, and encouragement. Writing to her Birmingham friend Kate Jevons, who had lost a sister, Parkes said tactfully:

I did not mean my note of interrogation to be inquisitive having boldly put the question, in some alarm at your apparent depressing state. I can fully sympathise with you; trouble does lower the whole tone of one's mind for long; and I well know that in losing Annie you lost not only a dear little sister, but a great aim and object of your home life; but dear Kate you have in all probability many years before you, wealth, education, and much energy of character, and you will make for yourself other great aims, and I believe that though more quiet, your heart will be as light as ever.³¹⁰

Repeatedly, Bodichon and her friends acknowledged how they valued their (epistolary) friendship for being uplifting ('thank you still more even, for the beautiful loving spirit of your letters!'),³¹¹ entertaining ('I have been having a good laugh over your joints[?] (& somewhat disjointed) epistle received this morning'),³¹² and a source of joyfulness ('Dearest Fellow, Your long letter came on me like a warm South wind out of the caverns of your heart').³¹³ Writing with passionate words Howitt confessed to Bodichon:

I cannot tell you how very, very much joy your dear letters give me – Oh, if ever I have done you good believe me the thought of you for years now, has been to me, as refreshing as the sea as the sky itself! – If ever I do anything outwardly good in the world it will indeed be greatly owing to you! How beautiful it is the influence one soul has over another! And how much you influence all around you for good!

³⁰⁸ Howitt to Bodichon, [1848], Beaky, letter 8.

³⁰⁹ Diaz, B. (2006) 'Avant-Propos', in Diaz, B. and Siess, J. (eds) *L'épistolaire au féminin: Correspondances de femmes XVIIIe-XXe siècle* (Caen: Presses Universitaires de Caen) p.9.

³¹⁰ Parkes to Jevons, 24 January 1847, GCPP Parkes 6/50.

³¹¹ Howitt to Bodichon, [5 January 1848], Beaky, letter 6.

³¹² Parkes to Bodichon, 22 July 1849, GCPP Parkes 5/32.

³¹³ Parkes to Bodichon, 12 February 1853, GCPP Parkes 5/65.

Your life either to yourself or to the world will not have been in vain – it is a glorious life!³¹⁴

Letter-exchange worked thus as a social and psychological instrument: it forged bonding, had communicational uses, and functioned as an emotional and psychological outlet for self-expression. In this thesis I propose to read the practice of letter-exchange and the act of letter-writing as educational instruments – education understood in the sense of *Bildung*. As I discuss throughout the following chapters, the social codes of letter-exchange and the nature of letters – the genre of letter-writing – determined how Bodichon articulated her *Bildung*.

Conclusion

In dialogue with theoretical debates within feminist historiography, in this chapter I introduced the methodology I employ in my epistolary study of Bodichon's *Bildung*. I proposed a conceptualization of letters in historical investigation; and I outlined the threefold combination of methods in epistolary analysis I employ in this thesis. I argued that this analytical combination is underpinned by a cross-epistemological approach that draws on poststructuralism and highlights the significance of Bodichon's epistolary voice and experience.

The problematised use of letters as historical data I propose in this thesis conceptualizes letter-writing as a *performative* autobiographical act constitutive of the self. On that account, the epistolary narrative is not an expression of the self. Rather, the self-narrating subject is (partially) constituted by the act of letter-writing. Letter-writing is a signifying practice that constitutes experience, which is in turn mediated by circulating discourses and articulated within the characteristics of the genre. That being so, epistolary narratives are projected self-images that reveal the process of self-constitution. Accordingly, I suggested that letters do not provide direct access to Bodichon's historical "I". Yet, despite their partial, subjective and mediated ontology, they offer insightful information about how Bodichon forged her self-cultivation. Additionally, Bodichon's epistolary "you" and the epistolary "I" in letters exchanged among her friends and referring

³¹⁴ Howitt to Bodichon, 11 February [1851], Beaky, letter 14.

to her are also sources of information about her *Bildung*. These epistolary narratives stand for the letter-writer's response to Bodichon's epistolary self-image. I outlined that an examination of 'letters to' Bodichon permits unpacking the intersubjective development of her *Bildung*.

The threefold combination of methods that I proposed include the analysis of the content and discourses present in Bodichon's and her friends' letters. Wishing to retain the referential value of letters, I argued that in this thesis I examine Bodichon's personal correspondence as sources of information. Yet, aware of the discursive nature of experience, I unpack the discursive subject positions the letter-writer mobilized in the process of articulating her self-fashioning. Based on this intertwined analysis of the content and discourses present in Bodichon's *epistolarium* (letters from, to and about her), I provide an interpretative analysis of the significance of letters in the development of her *Bildung*.

Informed by those feminist scholars that underline differences among women and that highlight the limits of first-wave feminism and second-wave feminist historiography, in this chapter I argued that my aim is to draw the attention to the classist and ethnocentric underpinnings of Bodichon's exercise of *Bildung* – an aspect of her feminist stance only briefly addressed in Bodichon studies. All in all, in this chapter I argued that a re-examination of Bodichon taking *Bildung* as a thinking tool and using a *performative* reading of letters permits suggesting a nuanced understanding of her figure, an innovative conceptualization of letters as informal sources of education, and a experimental problematization of letters as historical evidence.

Having put forward the methodology that underpins my thesis, I now move on to develop my epistolary study of Bodichon's *Bildung* in three central chapters, which I have named Knowledge Acquisition and Critical Thinking, Identity, and Autonomy.

5 Knowledge Acquisition and Critical Thinking

Introduction

As discussed in section 3.2.2. *Bildung* and the Unitarian philosophy of education have certain characteristics in common. We cannot be certain about Barbara Bodichon being familiar with the term *Bildung* – not least because much of what we understand today as Humboldt's theory of *Bildung* was gathered in a body of literature decades after his death. At the same time, as several authors claim, the idea of *Bildung* extended beyond the bounds of German culture throughout the nineteenth century. Klaus Mortensen and Lars Løvlie and Paul Standish underline the character of a *gebildet* person that underpins the works by William Wordsworth and John Stuart Mill for example;¹ Mill quoted from Humboldt's *The Sphere and Duties of Government* in the epigraph of *On Liberty* and acknowledged being influenced by him.² Highlighting Humboldt's legacy in liberal thought, John Roberts states that the chapters in *The Sphere and Duties of Government* advocating individuality, self-development and the necessity of liberty as a means to them were especially influential to Mill. Roberts adds that 'Humboldt's concept of individuality offered an escape that Mill was seeking from the narrow mechanistic view of man's nature promoted by Bentham and the early Utilitarians'.³ Bodichon did read Mill, Wordsworth, Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* and George Lewes's (Marian Evans' partner) biography of Goethe;⁴ and Bodichon's editor, John Chapman, published, the same year of her *Brief Summary*, a translation of Humboldt's *Sphere and Duties of Government*.⁵ Hirsch claims that Goethe's novel fuelled Bodichon's conviction to commit herself to action.⁶ Causality and influence are difficult to assess through Bodichon's letters. But, as I

¹ Løvlie L. and Standish, P. (2003) 'Introduction: *Bildung* and the Idea of a Liberal Education', in Løvlie L., Mortensen K.P. and Nordenbo S.E. (eds) *Educating Humanity: Bildung in Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell) pp.3-4; Mortensen, K.P. (2003) 'The Double Call: On *Bildung* in a Literary and Reflective Perspective', in Løvlie L., Mortensen K.P. and Nordenbo S.E. (eds) pp.121-140.

² Roberts, J. (2009) *Wilhelm von Humboldt and German Liberalism* (Oakville and Niagara Falls: Mosaic Press) p.22 and pp.82-83.

³ Ibid, p.35 and p.83.

⁴ Bodichon to Evans, 14 January 1856, Undercliff House, Ventnor, Isle of Wight, Yale University, Beinecke Library, George Eliot and George Lewes Collection, Box 7.

⁵ Humboldt, W. von (1854) *The Sphere and Duties of Government* (translated from the German by Joseph Coulthard; London: John Chapman).

⁶ Hirsch, P. (1998) *Barbara Bodichon: Feminist, Artist and Rebel* (London: Chatto and Windus) p.38.

argue in this chapter, Bodichon's education and her educational projects intersect with *Bildung* theory at certain points.

In this chapter I put forward the first dimension of my understanding of epistolary education (according to which letter-exchanges acted as educational tools). In section 5.1. I outline Bodichon's 'peculiar education' and I underline its *Bildung*-like elements. I suggest that hers was a rather unsystematic but wide-ranging and thought-provoking learning and that, in line with the links between *Bildung* and the Unitarians' philosophy of education outlined in chapter 3, certain characteristics of her educational scheme resonate with the essence of *Bildung*. The chapter moves on to explore the role of letters in the development of Bodichon's knowledge acquisition and critical thinking. My suggestion is that letter-exchange stimulated these two aspects of her *Bildung*. Letters acted as a rich source of knowledge exchange and as a forum for self-expression where Bodichon (and her friends Anna Mary Howitt and Bessie Parkes) developed their outlook. In sections 5.2. I examine how Bodichon's outlook was articulated in her letters triggered by best-selling works and by the activities Bodichon undertook as part of her later informal education: her family discussions, her sketching expeditions, the literary and political salons her father organized at home, and her socialization more broadly. In line with *Bildung*'s idea of formative social interaction as a way of forging one's individuality, I suggest that Bodichon shaped her outlook to a greater extent in the process of epistolary learning stimulated by the readings and educational activities she undertook within her later 'peculiar education'.⁷

5.1 *Bildung* in Bodichon's 'Peculiar Education'

Oh dear Barbara, your picture frame has made me think. What shall I do! What shall I educate myself for - writing? ... I do not feel in the least clever. I can understand some things better than girls perhaps because, like you, I have had a peculiar education, but I can produce nothing & I cannot read any page of the Universe, much less translate it to my brethren.

⁷ This chapter draws on Simon-Martin, M. (2012) 'Educational Place and Space: The Unconventional Education of Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon (1827-1891)', in Jacobs, A., Leach, C. and Spencer, S. (eds) 'Educated Women: Finding Place, Claiming Space' (Special Issue), *History of Education Researcher*, 89 (May) pp.7-17.

Parkes to Bodichon, 5 December 1849⁸

Following the Unitarian philosophy of education described in chapter 3, Bodichon acquired a higher standard of education than on average middle-class girls from other religious denominations were provided with. It consisted of an informal but comprehensive home instruction complemented by some years of schooling at two Unitarian institutions. According to Pam Hirsch, Bodichon 'enjoyed a peculiarly free intellectual life within her family',⁹ where her father wished 'to give his children both pleasure and education in its broadest sense'.¹⁰ The key elements of this 'peculiar education', to quote Parkes, was Bodichon's unrestrained access to knowledge – in the form of engaging lessons and reading as well as in terms of animated family discussions and excursions in the countryside, and sketching expeditions. Parkes' letter to Bodichon in the opening quotation can be interpreted as a self-presentation that, despite its apparent self-doubt, projects a confident position: that of a young woman (and by extension Bodichon too) who has received a wide, thorough and engaging education from which other friends and social counterparts are debarred. In this section I discuss the *Bildung*-like elements of Bodichon's 'peculiar education'.

Following the educational pattern of the wealthiest Unitarian families, Bodichon and her siblings received an excellent home education during their childhood years in Hastings. In line with Unitarians' (and *Bildung*'s) wish to provide a wide-ranging education, the Leigh Smith children received a thorough instruction from their governess, Catherine Spooner, and their private tutors: James Buchanan, the head teacher of Benjamin Smith's infant school, and Harry Porter, who gave them lessons in Latin and history. A local riding master, Mr. Willetts, taught them to ride.¹¹

During this period of home education, James Buchanan became a particularly influential figure.¹² He was a teacher at Robert Owen's school in New Lanark.¹³ He left this position to take up an appointment as head of an

⁸ Parkes to Bodichon, 5 December 1849, Cambridge University, Girton College Archives, Girton College Personal Papers (GCPP) Parkes 5/39.

⁹ Ibid, p.33.

¹⁰ Ibid, p.46.

¹¹ Ibid, p.18.

¹² Ibid, p.7.

¹³ Stewart, W.A.C. and McCann, W.P. (1967) *The Educational Innovators, 1750-1880* (London: Macmillan) pp.66-67 and p.247; Hirsch, P. (1998) p.6.

experimental infant school in London. The school was set up by the Infant School Society, formed by Benjamin Smith, Lord Brougham, and James Mill among other liberal reformers. Having visited Owen's school in 1818, they invited Buchanan to act as head teacher.¹⁴ After a year, these reformers abandoned the project due to disagreements with Buchanan's unorthodox teaching methods.¹⁵ But Benjamin Smith was convinced of Buchanan's pedagogy, which, to a certain extent, moved him away from the philanthropic approach of his colleagues. In consonance with *Bildung's* idea of enhancing humanity through individual self-cultivation, Smith, like many wealthy Unitarians, believed that it was his duty to support educational projects as a way of improving society. Smith continued the venture on his own and moved the school to a purpose-built house in Vincent Square, Carey Street, Westminster, a quite poor area.¹⁶

Buchanan's teaching methods were intimately bound up with his personality and his religious convictions. He was an adherent to the New Church, a religious movement based on the doctrines of the philosopher Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772).¹⁷ Swedenborgians held the belief that 'education began in infancy and was a lifelong training of the soul for the reception of truth'¹⁸ – an understanding of education reminiscent of Humboldt's conceptualization of *Bildung* as a lifetime's process of personal development. Also suggestive of Humboldt's belief in the need to stimulate imagination and to unlock the energy in man in interaction with the world through social intercourse, Buchanan taught children through interactive group play and in contact with nature as a way of stirring their imagination and learning. He encouraged children to learn through singing and playing songs he composed himself and which he accompanied with his flute.¹⁹ For example, he taught grammar and multiplication with catchy rhymes. Buchanan also told Bible stories to the children.²⁰ He taught them following the Swedenborgian principle whereby each object has its spiritual and

¹⁴ Stewart, W.A.C. and McCann, W.P. (1967) p.242 and p.247.

¹⁵ Bodichon to Alice Bonham-Carter, Scalands Gate, 28 May 1884, Buchanan, B.I. (ed.) (1923) *Buchanan Family Records: James Buchanan and his Descendants* (Capetown: Townshend, Taylor and Snashall) p.25.

¹⁶ Stewart, W.A.C. and McCann, W.P. (1967) pp.252-253.

¹⁷ Stewart and McCann suggest that Buchanan was introduced to Swedenborgianism by Benjamin Leigh Smith after moving to London in 1818, Ibid, p.246.

¹⁸ Ibid, p.245.

¹⁹ Julia Smith's comments on James Buchanan, Buchanan, B.I. (ed.) (1923) p.26.

²⁰ Bodichon to Florence [Davenport-Hill?], 5 Blandford Square, 1 July [1850s], Buchanan, B.I. (ed.) (1923) p.22.

moral equivalent: 'a stone corresponded to truth, a circle to harmony, and so on'.²¹ Bodichon attended her father's school when she was staying in London.²² During the school holidays Buchanan also acted as tutor of the Leigh Smith children both in Hastings and in their Glottenham Manor, near Robertsbridge.²³ They sang, danced and performed charades.²⁴ Buchanan enjoyed the countryside and used to take the Leigh Smith children for country walks. During these excursions he would teach them the symbolism of nature, which he used to pass on moral teachings.²⁵

Bodichon also received a more formal instruction. She attended a Unitarian school for middle-class girls in Upper Clapton, London, from about 1838 to at least 1841.²⁶ But it seems that Bodichon did not hold the school in high regard. The teachers followed a non-stimulating rote learning scheme alien to Bodichon's previous learning experience.²⁷ After Bodichon's school years, Philip Kingsford, an examiner of history and political science at the College of Preceptors in London, came to the Leigh Smith household to teach the youngest brother political economy, which ultimately benefited all siblings.²⁸ According to Hirsch, Bodichon endorsed Kingsford's definition of scholar, for it 'covered exactly the broad scope which she herself desired'. His approach resonates with *Bildung's* neo-humanistic idea of a holistic education where knowledge is acquired for its own sake for the purpose of enhancing humanity through individual self-cultivation. In *Two Lectures upon the Study of Political Philosophy* Kingsford noted:

it is the scholar alone who knows how, in the fullest measure, to grasp and to comprehend [the power of beauty]. In the soul of the scholar, the perception of beauty, at first vague and indistinct, and apparently purposeless except for immediate enjoyment, gradually acquires significance, and at last expands into an habitual admiration and love for all that is lofty and excellent ... The aspiration must have assumed some definite form; the energies must be capable of being concentrated, and brought to bear upon some high purpose. The whole being, physical, intellectual, and moral, must have been

²¹ Stewart, W.A.C. and McCann, W.P. (1967) p.249.

²² Bodichon to Florence [Davenport-Hill?], 5 Blandford Square, 1 July [1850s], Buchanan, B.I. (ed.) (1923) p.24.

²³ Julia Smith's comments on James Buchanan, *Ibid*, p.27.

²⁴ Bodichon to Florence [Davenport-Hill?], 5 Blandford Square, 1 July [1850s], *Ibid*, pp.22-24.

²⁵ Bodichon to Florence [Davenport-Hill?], 5 Blandford Square, 1 July [1850s], *Ibid*, p.23.

²⁶ Hirsch, P. (1998) p.18.

²⁷ Bodichon to Florence [Davenport-Hill?], 5 Blandford Square, 1 July [1850s], Buchanan, B.I. (ed.) (1923) p.25.

²⁸ Hirsch, P. (1998) pp.31-32 and p.101.

trained to some work of a dignified character – the very existence must be an instrument for attaining some further purpose.²⁹

His last words, ‘an instrument for attaining some further purpose’, can be read as a reference not to an instrumentalist use of education but to education as a way towards the enhancement of individuals and thus, as a means to progress.

In line with *Bildung*’s idea of a comprehensive education as a way of exploring one’s talents, Bodichon also received private painting lessons from Cornelius Varley, founding member of the Old Watercolour Society, and Collingwood Smith, a pupil of Prout.³⁰ Making use of the independent allowance her father endowed her when she turned 21, she also attended Francis Cary’s drawing classes at Bedford College for one year (1849).

Bodichon’s educational pattern was complemented by other distinctive features: the painting expeditions she embarked on with her sisters and female friends and on her own in view of improving her artistic skills; the regular family excursions and trips abroad that taught Bodichon practical lessons (which I discuss in the following chapter); and the vibrant political and literary salons her father organized both in Hastings and London where he invited the leading thinkers and artists of the day.

Avid for knowledge, in the 1851 census of Hastings Bodichon recorded her occupation as ‘scholar at home’.³¹ She acquired the knowledge, reasoning, and aesthetic elements of *Bildung* through a ‘peculiar’ provision of education thanks to her father’s progressive stance on girls’ education. Within this ‘peculiar education’ scheme, Bodichon shared her later informal educational activities with her friends Bessie Parkes and Anna Mary Howitt. As noted in chapter 4, Bodichon and Parkes met in 1846 in Hastings. By that time, Bodichon had received lessons from her governess, James Buchanan, Harry Porter, and had attended the Misses Woods’ school. Parkes had attended a family-run Unitarian school for girls in Leam, Warwickshire, from 1836 to 1845. There she learnt English literature, arithmetic, history, French, German, Latin and Greek. Unlike Bodichon’s, Parkes’ schooling seems to have been a valuable experience. William Field, the main teacher, a retired Minister of the Unitarian Chapel in Warwick, left an impression

²⁹ Kingsford, P. (1848) *Two Lectures upon the Study of Political Philosophy* (London: C.H. Law) p.36, quoted in Hirsch, P. (1998) pp.31-32.

³⁰ Hirsch, P. (1998) pp.19-21.

³¹ Ibid, p.32.

on her equivalent to Buchanan to Bodichon. Years after she regularly wrote about him in praising terms.³² The two friends regularly met either in Hastings or in London, where, as part of their daily routine, they developed further their education following an informal scheme. Together they rode on horse, visited acquaintances, walked up Hastings' East Cliff or around Westminster, sang, dressed up and performed plays.³³ Parkes lived in 6 Pelham Crescent. In the evening she walked a few minutes to Bodichon's house in number 9.

After her schooling Bodichon began to take tutorials in political economy with Philip Kingsford and continued painting under the aegis of several masters. For her part, Parkes studied German, Latin, Greek and geometry from a tutor, Mr. Farn. Besides their private tutorials, Bodichon and Parkes went to hear talks by literary figures such as Ralph Waldo Emerson,³⁴ and attended public lectures.³⁵ They also visited exhibitions in several art galleries.³⁶ Another regular activity that was part of their informal education was school visiting. The two friends also published their poems and short essays in the local newspapers *The Birmingham Journal* and *The Hastings and St Leonards' News*.

Anna Mary Howitt also took part in this informal education. Given that Quakers also held progressive views on women's education³⁷ and that she was the daughter of literary parents, she most probably received a thorough home instruction. Showing artistic talent from an early age, Howitt was encouraged to train at Henry Sass' Art Academy, London. She started in 1846, one year after having met Bodichon. Sass was a training school that male students attended before taking the entrance examination for the Royal Academy (women were excluded). At Sass, Howitt met fellow artists Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Holman Hunt.³⁸ As mentioned in section 4.3., for two years Howitt trained with German muralist and book illustrator Kaulbach in Munich. In order to practise their drawing and colouring techniques, Howitt, Bodichon and Parkes went on painting expeditions. Thus, whereas other girls were taught knitting and etiquette from the

³² Joseph Parkes to Parkes, [December 1843], GCPP Parkes 2/42; Parkes to Bodichon, [August 1847], GCPP Parkes 5/13; Parkes to Bodichon, Leam, 10 June 1849, GCPP Parkes 5/31; Parkes to Mary Swainson, London, 5 June 1851, GCPP Parkes 3/23.

³³ Hirsch, P. (1998) p.24.

³⁴ Parkes to Bodichon, 3 June 1848, GCPP Parkes 5/26.

³⁵ Parkes to Mary Swainson, Hampstead, 21 August 1848, GCPP Parkes 3/18.

³⁶ Parkes to Bodichon, London, 16 December 1849, GCPP Parkes 5/41.

³⁷ See for example Leach, C. (2003) 'Quaker Women and Education from Late Eighteenth to the Mid Nineteenth Century', PhD. Thesis, University of Southampton.

³⁸ Hirsch, P. (1998) p.23.

safety of their drawing-rooms and schools, Bodichon – true to the Unitarian (and *Bildung's*) educational tenet of mental and body development as interwoven – benefited from growing up in a healthy and active body by making sketching tours.

Bodichon, Parkes and Howitt combined relatively frequent meetings with periods separated from each other. In the following section I explore how, within the framework of Bodichon's later 'peculiar education', friendship correspondence provided Bodichon and her friends with spaces for the further acquisition of knowledge and the exercise of critical thinking – the first dimension of *Bildung* I highlight in this thesis.

5.2 Bodichon's Epistolary Learning

As discussed in chapter 4, letters allowed Bodichon and her female friends the opportunity to cement and maintain their friendship. Their correspondence had communicative and psychological ends. In addition, personal correspondence acted as an educational tool, which worked parallel to their later informal education. Indeed, letter-exchange allowed Bodichon and her friends the opportunity to share their views on the knowledge they were acquiring with their tutors and by themselves as well as on the stimulating activities they undertook as part of their later informal education. Following the letter-exchange social code of reciprocity, they recommended readings, lent each other books (or borrowed them from the library), and afterwards they discussed their views. Newspapers were a frequent resource too. As with books, Bodichon and her friends suggested reading articles, borrowed journal issues (often sent by post), and shared and contrasted their views by written word. Afterwards they wrote abstracts and exchanged viewpoints.

For example, after her schooling Parkes further studied German, French, geometry, Latin, and Greek with her tutor. By December 1847, commenting on the Greek dramas she translated into English, she avowed:

I am going to confess a heresy to you; I don't much like the Greek Drama in the translations, they are so frigid, & all about murders, battles, & the bad passions, anger & hate, & such horrid imprecations on the enemy, it almost takes away the sense of the sublime in reading, & you see in translation the idea is revealed in all its nakedness, to stand or fall, unadorned by its original beautiful

language, & stripped of the music & signing. Indeed the morality is so halting, sometimes good, sometimes execrable. ... Miss Bailey would say I had no appreciation of the sublime; I hope I have but beyond a certain pitch, of terror or anger is disgusting to me, is it not to you?³⁹

For her part, in December 1847 Bodichon was reading Elizabeth Barrett Browning's personal correspondence in the context of her social activities. Some days before receiving Parkes' letter Bodichon explained to her friend:

I dined with Miss Bayley & some of her friends on Monday & she read the letters of Miss Barrett & Mr Browning about their marriage. They are very affecting & beautiful Miss B had tears in her eyes while reading. What do you think of that? I do not know what to think.⁴⁰

In reply the following day Parkes commented:

Miss Bayley has puzzled me more than once & I doubt if people can pump up tears at will; the bad sisters in Beauty & the Beast were obliged to use onions so one must I suppose give Miss J B[ayley] credit for some degree of feeling at least in relation to Mrs. and Mr Browning. How I much like to have heard her letters.⁴¹

In turn, widening the network of epistolary friendship, three years later, in April 1850, Parkes sent her Birmingham childhood friend Kate Jevons poems by Elizabeth Browning – by then one of her favourite poets: 'I enclose some verses of a poem by my dearly beloved Elizabeth Barrett, Now Mrs Browning – Have you read her poems? The finest ever written by a woman – Get them if you can; especially read that one'.⁴²

Likewise, in April 1848 Parkes was reading Alfred Tennyson, Goethe and Percy B. Shelley – either on her own initiative or on her parents' or friends' recommendation. Interweaving her impressions with updates about her doings she wrote a letter to Bodichon where she put forward her first thoughts about these authors:

Tennyson came all sage. I have lent it twice. The first person did not appreciate it enough; I hope the second will. I have been reading Goethe's Autobiography, what lovely pictures all thro' the book. Tho I am no painter they delighted me inexpressibly; but man is selfish & views all the great problems of life & death & all the manifold interests of his fellow creatures only as they contributed to the artistic development of his own mind. ... Read Shelley's Revolt of

³⁹ Parkes to Bodichon, 24 December 1847, GCPP Parkes 5/18.

⁴⁰ Bodichon to Parkes, 15 December 1847, GCPP Parkes 5/164.

⁴¹ Parkes to Bodichon, 16 December 1847, GCPP Parkes 5/17.

⁴² Parkes to Jevons, 17 April 1850, GCPP Parkes 6/56.

Islam. I know you will like much of it. How busy you must be going about in the town. When do you come to Brighton? There were two poems of mine in the Birmingham Journal, of the 8th & 22, one called Poets in 1848, & the other Progression, I was so glad to see the first put in, as I dearsay you can fancy. I am taking Latin lessons, & I suppose you are drawing incessantly, tell me what Miss Howitt is doing, I feel as interested in her as if I knew her.⁴³

The day after Parkes wrote to Bodichon again, this time to recommend a poem by John Keats. It would seem that in a letter not extant anymore Bodichon gave Parkes her impressions on either her published poems or on a reading Parkes may have recommended:

I send both journals to you, & am very much obliged to you for the sympathy you express. I have just got town lyrics [by Charles Mackay?] & all I have read are beautiful. I am reading Keats' Endymion & so must you for it is full of the loveliest pictures of natural beauty.⁴⁴

For her part, Bodichon heartily recommended to Parkes the literary works she had discovered:

Before you finish off Winston's article you must read "Man's power over himself to prevent or control insanity"⁴⁵ one of the "Small books on great subjects". Notice page 102 relating to the superior unfortunate size of women's brains. The whole book is full of suggestive matter to us all. I am setting down to H[erbert] Spencer's Psychology⁴⁶ a wonderful book i can see that at a glance – a great part I have read in the Westminster.⁴⁷

Parkes' *letter to* Bodichon (footnote 44) enables the dialogical development of the two friends' learning/critical thinking to be underlined: in the context of Bodichon's own *Bildung* (e.g. she shared knowledge about thought-provoking readings and expressed her opinions), Parkes projected her achievements (her poems published in a local newspaper) and received feedback and encouragement from her friend (in a letter written by Bodichon no longer extant but referred in Parkes reply above).

These epistolary exchanges were written intellectual conversations, full of direct questions addressed to the recipient that triggered reactions and incited to

⁴³ Parkes to Bodichon, 29 April 1848, GCPP Parkes 5/22.

⁴⁴ Parkes to Bodichon, 30 April 1848, GCPP Parkes 5/23

⁴⁵ Barlow, J. (1843) *On Man's Power Over Himself to Prevent or Control Insanity* (London: William Pickering).

⁴⁶ Spencer, H. (1855) *The Principles of Psychology* (London: Longman, Green and Co.).

⁴⁷ Bodichon to Parkes, n.d., GCPP Parkes 5/171.

share further impressions. These epistolary conversations were a continuation of unfinished face-to-face discussions, as Parkes' letter to Bodichon suggests:

I have thought a great deal on one of our last conversations; I am sure you are wrong; too fastidious in feeling. Dearest between educated & uneducated people there is some difference but a vast similitude. We have the advantage in a few years of culture, we are fellows in feeling, perhaps not even fellows in goodness & they have souls, immortal capable.⁴⁸

Inversely, epistolary conversations triggered tête-à-tête chats. Having explained her long conversations on art with her painting master Kaulbach, Howitt wrote to Bodichon: 'When I see you I shall have a thousand things to talk with you about his views of Art – about his pictures about himself'.⁴⁹ Face-to-face and epistolary conversations were mutually complementary. This dynamic combination of intellectual dialogues was possible thanks to the range of delivery options available to these girls, which, as noted in chapter 4, were assorted and quite reliable.

Besides the readings they studied with their tutors, Bodichon and her friends had free access to the family library as well as to the newspapers to which their families subscribed. In addition, unlike most middle-class daughters, Bodichon and her friends had the time to indulge themselves in academic and recreational reading with hardly any domestic distractions. They ignored advice manuals that prescribed what and how middle-class girls should read and those medical texts that warned of the damaging effects of excessive reading on the female nature.⁵⁰ They read and debated the works by authors covering numerous fields of knowledge, including those genres deemed dangerous, such as fiction or French literature.⁵¹ This rich and varied reading – an 'ambitious reading programme' in Hirsch's words⁵² – is a striking illustration of the *Bildung*-like broad learning they gained unrestrictedly. In addition to the authors already mentioned, they read a varied number of well-known authors such as John Milton,⁵³ Henry

⁴⁸ Parkes to Bodichon, 28 November 1849, GCPP Parkes 5/38.

⁴⁹ Howitt to Bodichon, 57 Amalien Strasse, [Munich], 10 February [1851], Columbia University, Butler Library, Leonore Beaky, Letters of Howitt to Bodichon, letter 14.

⁵⁰ Flint, K. (1995) *The Woman Reader, 1837–1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press) chapters 5 and 3 respectively.

⁵¹ Ibid, especially chapter 9.

⁵² Hirsch, P. (1998) p.34.

⁵³ 'I will read Lycidas. I wonder what light haired angel guided Milton's pen when he wrote those early poems', Parkes to Bodichon, 22 June 1850, GCPP Parkes 5/50.

Fielding,⁵⁴ Samuel Richardson,⁵⁵ Charlotte Bronte,⁵⁶ Francis Bacon,⁵⁷ David Hume,⁵⁸ Hannah More,⁵⁹ George Combe,⁶⁰ Margaret Fuller,⁶¹ and Thomas Carlyle.⁶² Artistically ambitious, Bodichon and her friends also discussed poetry writing and drawing and colouring techniques in their personal correspondence. They commented on the works by William Turner,⁶³ ('Before me [there] is a beautiful engraving from Turner; I should call it "Ships in the offing"; the moon just risen, after sunset. When I look at it I think of your Venetian contortions');⁶⁴ William Holman Hunt ('What do you think of [William Holman] Hunt's "Conscience awakened" What does it mean?');⁶⁵ and the Pre-Raphaelite Brethren, as Parkes recommended to Jevons:

If you can, get a sight of the "Germ", a small publication put forth by a set of crazy poetical young men in London, artists mostly, who call themselves the "Pre Raphaelian brethren", & seek in all things for the "simplicity of Nature", which is uncommonly simple & soft. But they are full of true feeling in spite of their craziness, & in one of the first numbers in a lovely poem called "The blessed Damosel" (what a title) worthy of the very best company.⁶⁶

⁵⁴ 'Tom Jones is wonderfully lifelike; the same vigor as in Wilhelm Meister; about the same coarseness, but Fielding is thoroughly good, it is very satirical and witty', Parkes to Bodichon, 22 July 1849, GCPP Parkes 5/32.

⁵⁵ 'I am reading Clarissa Harlowe, I always wished to do so hearing it had such great talent, however it is very coarse indeed tho' very clever. I cannot conceive how Richardson could have written such a book only a century ago, and in a great measure for ladies; he moved in intellectual society too. The truth and nature are however exquisite, but I think the book would injure most girls at least school girls', 29 July 1847, GCPP Parkes 5/11.

⁵⁶ See quote in footnote 137 in section 4.3.

⁵⁷ 'During the last year I have been reading much of Combe and Bacon and such dry fellows making up my mind as it were', Parkes to Jevons, 11 November 1847, GCPP Parkes 6/51.

⁵⁸ 'Do you know I don't much like Hume quite independent of his theory; he was so horribly conceited; as bad in his way as Mr Tagart (?) in his; and fretful too, I don't think he was a noble good man do you?', Parkes to Bodichon, 24 December 1847, GCPP Parkes 5/18.

⁵⁹ 'I am busy with Mr Farn again. The translating into verse takes me an hour a day besides preparation and lessons, so I have not much time: did you read Hannah More's life in those female examples? It is very good. I have a great love and liking for Hannah More in spite of her evangelicism [sic]. She was a good woman', Parkes to Bodichon, Albion, 5 December 1847, GCPP Parkes 5/16.

⁶⁰ 'During the last year I have been reading much of Combe and Bacon and such dry fellows making up my mind as it were', Parkes to Jevons, 11 November 1847, GCPP Parkes 6/51.

⁶¹ 'I am drawing the East Hill for Colly on Monday; from old sketches; and I think of our many walks, and how you were there very indignant with me for delighting in the Bachanals. Oh do read Margaret Fuller. The Bachanal Question puts me in mind of her', Parkes to Bodichon, 6 March 1862, GCPP Parkes 5/60a.

⁶² 'I have all Carlyle's miscellaneous essays to read at good times! When I have time I will write as you with but it takes such a deal of thinking!' Parkes to Bodichon, 24 August 1849, GCPP Parkes 5/35.

⁶³ Parkes to Bodichon, 9 November 1850, GCPP Parkes 5/52.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Hunt, W. (1853) 'The Awakening Conscience', Bodichon to Parkes, [1853], GCPP Parkes 5/180a.

⁶⁶ Parkes to Jevons, Hastings, 17 April 1850, GCPP Parkes 6/56.

In her epistolary conversations Bodichon and her friends shared their artistic doubts, projects, and achievements. A would-be-poet, Parkes wrote verses for private circulation, some of which she managed to publish (as outlined above):

I am so glad you like City Scenes [a poem by Parkes]: you have read it before but forgotten it. Do you think I shall ever be much of a poet, tell me truly. It is odd but I think more of your opinion there than of anyone's because tho' in poets you don't always like what I think beautiful, you never admire anything I don't. Therefore I give you, tho' not a negative, a very strong positive voice.⁶⁷

In turn, these friends offered each other advice and encouragement – a question I further discuss in chapter 7. Seemingly, Bodichon sent Parkes words of support (in a letter no longer extant) and Parkes replied optimistically:

My soul was greatly stirred within me at the receipt of your note, it being about the second expression of liking anything I have written that ever I cared much about. People are so soft in fancying anything with rhyme in it one shows them, & I wish so earnestly to qualify myself for something much higher than merely that. Send me as much criticism as you can.⁶⁸

As outlined above, Parkes' *letter to* Bodichon permits highlighting the dialogical and reciprocal development of these two friends' *Bildung*.

This encouragement was also intermittently transmitted by letter from America. Elizabeth Blackwell was a Bristol born American doctor. She graduated from a college in Geneva, New York, and continued her studies in a school for midwives in Paris. She arrived in London in 1850, where she trained as an obstetric surgeon at St Bartholome's Hospital. In London she met Parkes and, through her, Bodichon, Howitt, and Marian Evans. She moved back to New York one year later and kept in contact with her friends by letter.⁶⁹ After having given a long update on her advancement in establishing an infirmary for women and children in New York, to her 'Reform Firm' friends she wrote:

I am much interested in hearing of your plans and performances in Art, literature and social reform – I would take a long walk to see some of Barbara's paintings, and I cannot read Bessie's poems,

⁶⁷ Parkes to Bodichon, [1849], GCPP Parkes 5/33.

⁶⁸ Parkes to Bodichon, [August 1847], GCPP Parkes 5/13.

⁶⁹ Boyd, J. (2005) *The Life of the first Woman Physician. The Excellent Doctor Blackwell* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing) pp.95-140.

without imagining the tone and the look which used to put so much soul into beautiful form.⁷⁰

These letters of support, encouragement and constructive criticism suggest that, in addressing the epistolary “you” in the same way as the letter-writer had projected herself (e.g. Parkes’ self-image as a would-be-poet is also present in Blackwell’s narrative), these friends confirmed and thus contributed to circulating the self-images they wished to display – a question I will highlight further in the coming chapters.

The wide range of books and articles Bodichon and her friend read reflect the kind of *Bildung*-like approach to knowledge they adopted: a general, broad learning not targeted exclusively to a particular vocation but for the engagement of knowledge for its own sake.⁷¹ In accordance with *Bildung*’s integration of knowledge with moral and aesthetic assessment and its critical engagement with the world, these readings – and the other stimulating activities they undertook as part of their later informal educational scheme – prompted discussions on a wide range of topics. Bodichon and her friends reflected on literature, political economy, philosophy, science, poetry-writing and painting techniques as well as on national politics, religion, social reform, international affairs, ethical and moral issues, and social customs, including the condition of women in society. An examination of the intellectual epistolary dialogues established between Bodichon and her friends reveals not only their acquisition and sharing of knowledge but also the distinct development and confident exercise of their critical thinking.

In the following section I will examine three examples of epistolary learning as triggered by three well-known authors: Alfred Tennyson, John Stuart Mill, and Harriet Martineau. I will discuss how through epistolary dialogues knowledge was shared and critical thinking confidently exercised. I will also discuss how the *Bildung* principle of forging one’s individuality through interaction is present in Bodichon’s epistolary dialogues. For the habit of expressing her personal views in letters addressed to her best friends and the act of receiving feedback contributed to the formation of Bodichon’s outlook. In the process, she engaged critically with

⁷⁰ Blackwell to Bodichon, 5 June [early-, mid-1850s], Columbia University, Butler Library, Elizabeth Blackwell Letters, Box 1 Folder 2.

⁷¹ In section 3.4. I discussed the normative implications of this approach to knowledge. I will discuss further this element of *Bildung* in the coming chapters.

discursive traditions, including prevailing notions of bourgeois femininity. In this section I will also outline how 'letters to' expand our understanding of the reciprocal development of *Bildung* in Bodichon *and* her female friends.

5.2.1 Engaging Readings

As a site of reflection and self-expression, letter-writing created a space for Bodichon to confide her feelings and lay out her personal views on a variety of matters, very often brought about by readings. Making reference to the impact that Frederika Bremer's book *Hertha* (1856) exerted on Bodichon's sense of purpose in life, Hirsch highlights that 'the apparently private activity of women reading at home had potential social implications'. The novel depicts the author's own experience of suffering under male guardianship of her finances and raises the question of women's poor education provision and their lack of freedom. According to Hirsch, the heroine inspired in Bodichon the desire to fix 'on a train of action' – making of her reading of Bremer's novel 'One of the crucial moments in Barbara's development'.⁷²

As Kate Flint suggests in her study of the topos of the woman reader in nineteenth and early twentieth-century Britain, the activity of reading played a significant part in the formation of the subject.⁷³ It was 'the vehicle through which an individual's sense of identity was achieved or confirmed'.⁷⁴ And the practice of reading 'provided a site for discussion, even resistance' rather than conformity.⁷⁵ Reading was a site of struggle⁷⁶ where women took personalized subject positions.⁷⁷ In line with Flint's interpretation of reading, I suggest that Bodichon (and her friends) projected an articulation of this self-formation stimulated by reading in the epistolary narratives she exchanged with them. In the course of these epistolary conversations she forged her subjectivity, which concomitantly involved discourse reappropriation. Indeed, consistent with *Bildung's* notion of critical mimesis through formative interplay as a way of forging one's individuality, epistolary spaces served as forums where she adopted, challenged and

⁷² Hirsch, P. (1998) pp.35-36.

⁷³ Flint, K. (1995) p.41.

⁷⁴ Ibid, p.15.

⁷⁵ Ibid, pp.vii–viii.

⁷⁶ Ibid, p.12.

⁷⁷ Ibid, p.40 and p.43.

reappropriated assumptions on womanhood, and thus, developed an individuated sense of self. In an essay Humboldt highlights that, as a source of education, the art of social intercourse:

attempts to place the individualities and the groupings within each relationship in such a fashion that to an observer they will form an instructive image of variety in functioning, and at the same time make the people involved in them both more receptive and more individuated.⁷⁸

My suggestion is that the following three examples of epistolary conversation as triggered by readings illustrate the mechanism of social intercourse as source of education. Bodichon, Howitt and Parkes stand for receptive and individuated agents and their epistolary dialogues represent the 'image of variety in functioning' referred in Humboldt's quote.

At the end of 1847, an epistolary discussion between Bodichon, Parkes and Howitt about Tennyson's poem 'The Princess' triggered an epistolary debate on women's education and marriage. 'The Princess' is a narrative poem that tells the story of a princess, Ida, who, defying custom, founds a university for women. With the help of two friends, the prince to whom she was betrothed in infancy manages to enter the institution disguised in female attire. The three young men are discovered and, in the fight for the princess' hand, are seriously wounded. They are nursed back to health by the college students and, eventually, Ida returns to the prince.

On 11 November 1847, Parkes suggested Alfred Tennyson's poems to Jevons. Intertwined with updates of her doings and other stimulating readings and activities she wrote:

Have you much knowledge of German? I am commencing again after a long interval. Languages are not pleasant to me, and I can only screw up to them for the sake of the literature, the essence of which, at least in Poetry, is nearly untranslatable. I have read very little of Shakespeare as yet, but have begun, being incited to it by two friends who are mad on the subject [probably Bodichon and their friend Maria Highmore]. *Midsummer Night's Dream* was one of the first I read and I quite lost myself. I have read but little poetry in my life compared to prose. During the last year I have been reading much of Combe and Bacon and such dry fellows making up my mind as it were. Do you admire Alfred Tennyson's Poems? I do so intensely.

⁷⁸ Humboldt, W. von (1795) 'Plan for a Comparative Anthropology', p.382, in Cowan, M. (ed.) (1963) *Humanist Without Portfolio: An Anthology of the Writings of Wilhelm von Humboldt* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press) p.74.

There is something to be got over in a confused though splendid Diction, but the kernel is worth cracking for.⁷⁹

One month afterwards, on 26 December 1847 Howitt referred to Tennyson's latest publication: 'The Princess'. Anxious to get a copy she wrote to Bodichon:

As for my own drawing concerns – I think they are going on very well – I have a weeks holiday and am doing several things at home which I like rather – Alfred [her brother] who is also at home read "Le Juif Errant"⁸⁰ aloud to me whilst I draw – and thus we pass many pleasant hours – We are both greatly interested in the book – It is splendidly written but very dreadful – very painful – after all – I like books in which good and not evil is victorious – Have you seen Leigh Hunt's Xmas book – The Jar of Honey from Mount Hybla – that is a lovely book! And full of a beautiful spirit! I want Tennyson's new poem to arrive – I wish it would come this week – and yet I don't either for I could not resist reading it and there is so much I have set myself to do – I fear you will think me very forgetful of my promises. When I was with you I said I would see about your getting back your Arabian Nights – well I have asked Miss Wood about them, and she says she will look them out for you – they are in a book-case behind some other books – rather difficult to get at – but you shall be sure to get them again if I can manage.⁸¹

Only three days after, Howitt had read the poem and, recommending it, she shared her impressions with her friend:

My dearest Barbara,
we have just read Tennyson's new poem "The Princess", and are delighted with it – and now I want you to get it and read it also, and let me know your opinion – I think all true women must like it, and for the sake of the beautiful noble conclusion henceforth enthrone Tennyson on a golden throne in their hearts – It is [a] poem on woman's education, women's rights, woman's true being – and according to our notions noble and true – It is a "medly" as the title-page sets forth, and one truly – but the great aim it seems to me is clearly set forth – I cannot think that Tennyson meant by saying we should not like it – "not at least until we had read it three times" – It is full of lovely pictures and most artistic in every way, but one, and perhaps that too is intentional – I wonder whether the Princess herself Ida, will remind you of yourself? She strangely reminded me of you throughout – I am impatient till I know whether you like the poem or not – The whole poem is an embodiment of Tennyson.
January 2nd/48

⁷⁹ Parkes to Jevons, Brighton, 11 November 1847, GCPP Parkes 6/51.

⁸⁰ Sue, E. (1844) *Le Juif Errant* (Paris: Paulin).

⁸¹ Howitt to Bodichon, [26 December 1847], Beaky, letter 4.

... I see there is this week in the Athenaeum a review of "the Princess" – good on the whole I think; you will see some extracts there.⁸²

Seemingly, Bodichon took some time to read the poem because by 5 January Howitt insisted:

I shall be very glad to know what you think of Tennyson's new poem – I should not wonder if at first you do not like it – Have you read "Le Juif Errant" – if so, do you remember that noble Adrienne de Cardoville? As far as I have yet read she also has strangely reminded me of yourself – so independent, so full of generous impulse, and with such an artistic soul to say nothing of her person – I am very very much interested in the whole book – It is wonderfully clever, but so painful – I don't like books which make one believe evil is stronger than good.⁸³

The same day Parkes sent a letter to Bodichon where she expressed her regret for not being able to buy a copy of the poem just yet. Bodichon may have passed Howitt's recommendation to Parkes, because she replied:

Dearest Barbara,
I have not read the Princess yet, because I bought more books than I thought right last year & began this with a resolution to leave off; therefore I made up my mind to go without buying the Princess for some weeks after it came out. The truth is I have a sort of greediness after prints & books, & it is as much a weakness as any other ordinate desire unless one is very rich. You say you are still in love with Miss Howitt; I think by her letters [probably enclosed for Parkes to read] she dearly loves you so it is all right. How heartily she expresses her ideas & feelings I like it very much.⁸⁴

Some days later, Parkes informed Bodichon of having borrowed 'The Princess' from her mother and offered her friend a copy. Apparently Bodichon had not yet read the poem. It seems Howitt shared her thoughts on the poem with Parkes, either by writing a letter to her or via Bodichon, who may have enclosed the above letter by Howitt with her comments on Tennyson (29 December) in a letter addressed to Parkes. The latter wrote to Bodichon:

I have read Tennyson. My Mother gave it to me, & how shall I send it to you? Anna Mary's critique is word for word, which I thought is exquisite. True it is as he said a medley[,] missing modern aspirations with chivalrous manners, & thus it will not hear strict criticism but it

⁸² Howitt to Bodichon, [29 December 1847], Beaky, letter 5.

⁸³ Howitt to Bodichon, [5 January 1848], Beaky, letter 6.

⁸⁴ Parkes to Bodichon, 5 January 1848, London Metropolitan University, Women's Library, Papers of Barbara McCrimmon related to Barbara Bodichon Bodichon, 7BMC/F16.

is one lovely dream throughout & I am sure you would like it. Ida is so bold & yet so quiet & stately withal, a very ideal of womanhood & the end as A[nna] M[ary] said is “true & noble”. I think you would marry the prince were there such a creature he would satisfy even your romance ... I am reading the Legende of Gode Women, which is very fantastique & beautiful. I can read Chaucer’s old English pretty well now. Likewise I have begun the Taming of the Shrew and I just finished King Lear. I shall become soon as Shakespeare cracked as you or Maria Highmore.⁸⁵

By the end of January Parkes concluded:

You like the Princess enough to satisfy even me. You see nothing absurd in Ida; now tho’ I thought her a magnificent creature I thoroughly agreed with Tennyson’s moral. I think she set the laws of God aside in [her?] attempting the cure of our great social evils. I heartily love her for her enthusiasm for her sex but she went to the other extreme & put the men below instead of equal. I am so firmly convinced as you must be that marriage or union of some kind between men & women is meant, it is crazy to doubt it, there must be a continuing of the race, that the object is not to banish that union from all consideration in education or ~~political~~ legal arrangements, but to endeavour her to make it as noble & dignified & a source of happiness to both parties as possible. Now Ida seems to me to have forgotten this at first. Did it not strike you that if Ida had been a man she might have left the women under as she nobly confessed at the end there was mixed up with her truth a little “Love of women, not rights” How gorgeous the descriptions are, it is one dream of beautiful images throughout.⁸⁶

Bodichon’s letters are not extant. Putting into play the notion of narrative relationality, these epistolary dialogues suggest that the three friends slightly disagreed on how to interpret Princess Ida’s deeds. Excited about the poem and anxious to know her friend’s impressions, Howitt was ‘delighted with it’. She considered it ‘noble and true’, ‘full of lovely pictures and most artistic in every way’ and she regarded its conclusion ‘beautiful [and] noble’. According to Parkes, Bodichon liked the poem and saw ‘nothing absurd in Ida’. Seemingly, Bodichon (and maybe Howitt too) approved of Ida’s wish to redress an injustice against women by founding a university for women and didn’t see any contradiction in Ida combining her desire to improve the provision of women’s education and her wish to marry the prince. For her part, Parkes agreed with Howitt in that the poem, although ‘a medley[,]’ missing modern aspirations with chivalrous

⁸⁵ Parkes to Bodichon, [January 1848], GCPP Parkes 5/19.

⁸⁶ Parkes to Bodichon, 28 January 1848, GCPP Parkes 5/20.

manners', was 'true & noble'. Like Bodichon, Parkes also thought that Ida was 'a magnificent creature' and that she was right to attempt 'the cure of our great social evils'. However, Parkes disagreed with Bodichon in that she 'thoroughly agreed with Tennyson's moral'; that is, in the process, 'she [Ida] went to the other extreme & put the men below instead of equal'. In Parkes' view, Ida's wish to marry the prince was understandable. For she was 'firmly convinced' that 'marriage or union of some kind between men & women is meant'. It would be 'crazy to doubt it' because 'there must be a continuing of the race'. The problem in Parkes' eyes was that Ida, by putting men below, could not make her marriage 'noble & dignified & a source of happiness to both parties as possible'.⁸⁷ All in all, stimulated by a best-selling poem that they recommended to each other, Bodichon and her friends exchanged their impressions via letter-exchange. By expressing and receiving each other's feedback, they developed their outlooks and thus, individualized their subjectivity. That is, these letter excerpts illustrate Humboldt's idea that engaging with others' perspectives prompts learning. For it is by communicating that one acquires the richness of the other. Yet, retaining one's independence and using one's critical mimesis, the engagement with the other implies fashioning one's outlook. For the friction that emerges from contrasting others' ideas leads to a further precise definition of one's individuality. The intersubjective and reciprocal development of Bodichon's and her friends' *Bildung* is brought to light by dint of the 'letters to' Bodichon excerpted in this example of epistolary conversation.

In like manner, an epistolary discussion between Bodichon, Parkes and Jevons about John Stuart Mill's *Principles of Political Economy* stimulated Bodichon's (and most probably Parkes') feminist consciousness.⁸⁸ At the end of 1848, Bodichon studied with her tutor Philip Kingsford Mill's best-selling book, published that same year. To her friend Parkes she reported:

Read Whately Logic⁸⁹ not the reprint from the Ency[clopaedia] Brit[annica] which is only the 1st essay, & all is better put in the Vol. I have so enjoyed doing the Mill with P[hilip]K[ingsford], he can teach well. He is so precise and clear. It is so very cold I can't draw out.
Love to Mrs. Parkes

⁸⁷ Parkes to Bodichon, 28 January 1848, GCPP Parkes 5/20.

⁸⁸ Mill, J.S. (1848) *Principles of Political Economy* (London: [unknown]).

⁸⁹ Bodichon may be referring to Richard Whately, *Elements of Logic*, Whately, R. (1826) *Elements of Logic* (London: [unknown]).

Yrs Affecly
Bar⁹⁰

Simultaneously, encouraged by her father, and maybe monitored by her tutor (Mr Farn), Parkes read Mill's book. In turn, she recommended it to her Birmingham friend. Writing from Hastings she explained:

Now I am going to draw two hours a day, straight lines and curves, etc.; going regularly through Harding's lessons on Art. Then I am reading Shakespeare, and going to read Ruskin's "Seven Lamps" & I am pegging away two hours a day at Mill's Political Economy; abstracting it. If you can get that book you will like it so much. My Father told me to read it. It is hard but understandable, and so beautiful and lucid. Then I have lots of letters to write, etc., etc., & every evening at seven I go in to No. 9 to read to dear Barbara, who is dim-sighted. And then I am trying to summon up courage for Latin!⁹¹

In Hastings Bodichon and Parkes agreed on writing each an abstract of the book. Mobilizing the ongoing liberal and feminist discourses she was imbued with via her father and her Aunt Julia, Bodichon's abstract was politically committed. She wrote a comprehensive précis of Mill's arguments and, having considered their implications, she added her own evaluative judgement on his work. The introductory lines of her essay read:

I cannot criticize the book, yet there is something with which I can find fault or rather regret, for it is not fault, I mean that Mill touching so often on unsettled question of the greatest importance, & interest, has not gone away from Pol. Ec., dilated & given us his valuable opinion upon them. The Contract of Marriage to which he just alludes is one the Laws concerning women is another & there are many more. As far as he has let one see his views he thinks nobly rightly & literally. And I wish with my whole soul that one who carries so much weight would put these things before men & I do not doubt that they would see the injustice of their laws to women & the absurdity of the present laws of marriage & divorce.

Her final remarks ended with an appeal to action:

Philosophers & Reformers have generally been afraid to say anything about the unjust laws both of society & country which crush women. There never was a tyranny so deeply felt yet born so silently, that is

⁹⁰ Bodichon to [Parkes], [October or November 1848], GCPP Parkes 5/162.

⁹¹ Parkes to Jevons, Hastings, 7 November 1849, GCPP Parkes 6/54.

the worst of it. But now I hope there are some who will brave ridicule for the sake of common justice to half the people of the world.⁹²

We do not have the type of chains of letters described above and only Bodichon's résumé is extant. But Parkes seems to have experienced a similar process of feminist awareness. During the epistolary courtship she conducted with her fiancé Sam Blackwell (which I discuss in chapter 7), Parkes acknowledged Mill's influence on her. To Blackwell she wrote: 'If you look in John Stuart Mill's book you will see passages there which, early read, have vitally influenced my mind on human relations'.⁹³ In her courtship letters Parkes referred to Mill's works to claim her professional identity in her future married life. In 1860 she published a paper on Mill in *The English Woman's Journal* largely drawing on Bodichon's abstract.⁹⁴ In section 4.2.4. I argued that, unlike her publications, Bodichon's letters throw light on the *development* of her feminism. Inversely, here Parkes' publication permits supporting the idea that reading Mill was influential in her wish to develop her career as an author independently of her marital status – a suggestion that cannot be known for certain because, unlike Bodichon's, Parkes' résumé of *Principles of Political Economy* is not extant.

The work and the figure of Harriet Martineau also impressed the two girls beyond their teenage years. Her works triggered discussions on varied topics. Only Parkes' letters are extant. Putting into play the principle of narrative relationality we can suggest that, like Tennyson and Mill, Martineau aroused epistolary conversations as described above. Commenting on Martineau's *The History of the Thirty Years' Peace, A.D. 1816-1846* (1849) Parkes wrote to Bodichon:

I do quite like Miss M[artineau]'s history [book]. Tho' it is very interesting, there is so much assumption in it, she decides so on men & events, & uses forever the words "wise men", "farseeing men", "everybody knew", it is even carried so far as to be quite a defect in style. But it is perhaps natural for one who has done such extraordinary things, for a woman to be a little aware of it. ... But Miss M[artineau]; she is wonderful. Now we have other clever women more of her stamp; 20 years ago I think there was not one.

⁹² Bodichon's abstract on *Principles of Political Economy*, Hastings, January 1849, GCPP Bodichon 4/2.

⁹³ Parkes to Sam Blackwell, Barmouth, 23 September 1854, GCPP Parkes 9/7.

⁹⁴ Parkes, B. (1860) 'The Opinions of John Stuart Mill Part I', *The English Woman's Journal*, 31 (6), September, pp.1-11; Parkes, B. (1860) 'The Opinions of John Stuart Mill Part II', *The English Woman's Journal*, 33 (6), November, pp.193-202.

She was the first, she has helped on by her example all the others. 20 years ago it's a world thing of a woman to write on political economy.⁹⁵

Indeed, women writers like Harriet Martineau, Mary Howitt and Anna Jameson provided a model of female achievement that became a reference to Bodichon and her friends.

By the end of the 1840s Bodichon and Parkes exchanged each a poem that encapsulates this process of sharing/acquiring knowledge and exercising critical thinking triggered by readings. Bodichon's poem expresses the type of wide range of fields of knowledge she and her friends discussed in their epistolary and face-to-face conversations. It portrays women as rational thinking beings, capable of thought and criticism – a confident self-projection that suggests Bodichon's challenge to the male orientation of *Bildung*:

You and I have talked apace
Of everything, and of every place
Of being body live or dead
On horseback with the leaves o'er head
Oh! I remember very well,
You a hundred times did tell,
How you wish, you could excel,
In poesy Oh heaven & hell ...
[We] Have said that Priests we do detest 'em
And worse if Bishops hands have bless'd em
"Stupid" we've called all the Stoics
And sworn at those who praise Heroics.
I stormed at all the Roman Heros
Found all the lessons bad as Nevos
We've called in question laws of States
But with few facts & fewer dates
... Oh! I cannot name
The stones we did defame
Bodichon to Parkes, [late 1840s]⁹⁶

For her part, Parkes' poem about Alexander Pope's treatment of women encapsulates these young women's capacity for critical thinking. While drawing on classical authors in British literature such as Pope, they were capable of offering criticism and distancing from those values they disagreed with – here the question of the 'female nature' and its capacities. By making reference to Mary Howitt and Harriet Martineau, Parkes' poem also shows their reliance on strong

⁹⁵ Parkes to Bodichon, [late 1840s], GCPP Parkes 5/155.

⁹⁶ Poem by Bodichon enclosed in a letter to Parkes, [late 1840s], GCPP Parkes 5/161.

examples of female achievement. The poem, with its sharp satire on Pope, is quoted at length to conclude this section's examples on knowledge and critical thinking triggered by reading:

Dear Barbara,
In discussing various questions,
The truth of morals, or the fate of nations,
A subject co-important with the state,
Our sex, has held due place in our debate,
Pope sorely has maligned all womankind,
To vice quick sighted, and to virtue blind;
With Eagle eye he scanned this God-made world,
His thunderbolt at minor follies hurled;
Dealing abuse, he called it manly sport,
And drew his human nature from a court.
I grant the present age may find a sample
To prove of all his censures an example
...
(So Pope (in his inimitable strain)
Would paint this century could he live again.
It is a one sided picture; earth has shown
We have some brains among our Sex, our own.
Some kindly woman heart, some female mind.
To swell the chorus which uplifts mankind.
Some of the "weaker Sex" who yet will dare
to – expedite male rulers in the – air.
And lay the wily arts of tyrants bare.
You cannot need another word to show it;
I need but name a Martineau and Howitt.
Nay leave the walks of Genius; look below;
Where midst the crowd the humble wild flowers grow.
All are not frivolous; all are not deaf
To voice of reason or to law of faith.
How many a Mother labours for her son,
His guide upon a higher path begun
How many hovel homes behold a wife
Shedding the hearts best sunshine over life;
How many women labour night and day
Not for an idol or an end of day;
Passion and vanity in strong control,
To train for life and good an important soul.
Some I have known; and so in truth must you,
Who strong and earnest, good and gentle too,
Would both by law and reason give us scope to fine for libel
Alexander Pope.
Bessie R. Parkes.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Parkes to Bodichon, [late 1840s], GCPP Parkes 5/1.

The intellectual epistolary conversations I have presented in this section show how best-selling works set into motion the network of epistolary dialogues between Bodichon and her closest friends. The exchange of views on 'The Princess', *Principles of Political Economy*, and *The History of the Thirty Years' Peace* provided these young women with the occasion to reflect on their content, which in turn activated a discussion on marriage, women's education and rights, and female achievement. As these examples illustrate, letter-exchange, as an educational tool, served as a space where Bodichon and her friends acquired and shared knowledge and developed their critical thinking – that is, they shaped their outlook. Critically engaging with gender expectations and challenging prejudices against women, in their epistolary narratives these three friends put forward a revised understanding of womanhood. In the process of projecting textually their subjectivity, letter-exchange fuelled the articulation of their feminist thought. Bodichon's letters are testimony to how her feminist approach was (partially) originated and shaped through her epistolary dialogues.⁹⁸

In turn, this epistolary articulation of feminism fed her subsequent independent lifestyle and contributed to triggering her involvement in social reform – a question I discuss in chapter 7. Thus, within the context of a progressive Unitarian background that encouraged her individuality, her critical thinking ultimately contributed to a life devoted to self-improvement and reformist action. For instance, reading Mill and reaching the above conclusion may be interpreted as contributing to the gestation of subsequent writings such as *Brief Summary in Plain Language of the Most Important Laws Concerning Women* (1854). In the same way, it may have contributed to fostering her participation in the launch of the Married Women's Property Campaign (1856) and of the Women's Suffrage Movement (1865), where Mill was instrumental during its first years. The same could be said of Tennyson's poem. Deprived of any higher education, Bodichon, like Ida, dreamed of a university college for women and largely contributed to the

⁹⁸ This development and negotiation of feminism is most clearly evident in Bodichon's letters relating to the female suffrage (c1865-1869). In Simon-Martin, M. (2010), I discuss the logistical role letter-exchange played during the first female suffrage campaign in England, which put into contact Bodichon (in Algiers), Helen Taylor (Avignon), and John Stuart Mill and other activists (in London) to organize the first campaign to ask for women's political rights. In this article I also argue that letters provided a forum where opposing feminist stances and campaigning strategies were negotiated and compromises reached, Simon-Martin, M. (2010) 'Letter Exchange in the Life of Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon: The First Female Suffrage Committee in Britain Seen through her Correspondence', in Fillard, C. and Orazi, F. (eds) *Exchanges and Correspondence. The Construction of Feminism* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing) pp.188-213.

foundation of Girton College. Likewise, readings such as 'The Princess' and *Principles of Political Economy* may be interpreted as contributing to convince her of the importance of self-fulfilment and thus of following an individuated course of action. In turn, this personal prospect may have been confidently projected inspired by the successful achievements of women like Martineau. Eventually, Bodichon's individuated course of action took the form of a committed engagement as a women's rights campaigner and social reformer and a successful professional artistic career.

The habit of reading novels, poems, plays, treatises and newspaper articles and exchanging views on them via epistolary dialogues – a seemingly private (feminine) practice – was translated into individualized life choices and an enthusiastic public involvement. This epistolary articulation of her subjectivity took place within the framework of her 'peculiar education' and ran parallel to other sources of learning and critical thinking such as her sketching tours, her father's political and literary salons, school visiting, and the public lectures she attended with her friends. It is to the question of stimulating educational activities as articulated in epistolary dialogues that I now turn.

5.2.2 Stimulating Informal Educational Activities

In the previous section I discussed how Bodichon's and her friends' (feminist) outlook was articulated in their letters triggered by best-selling works. Activities such as her family discussions, her sketching expeditions and school visiting also provided Bodichon with first-hand experiences to stimulate the development of her subjectivity. In an unpublished essay, Humboldt underlines the necessity to expose oneself to a variety of situations:

The true aim of man – not any which is suggested by changing preference but that which is prescribed by forever unchangeable reason – is the highest and best proportioned development of all his capacities, in order to form a wholeness of himself. Freedom is its first, indispensable condition. But it demands something more than freedom, something which is connected with freedom, to be sure, and that is: variety of situation. The freest, most independent human

being cannot develop properly if he is placed into a monotonous situation.⁹⁹

Resonating with *Bildung*'s idea of formative varied social interaction as a way of forging one's individuality, I suggest that Bodichon shaped her own outlook to a greater extent in the process of epistolary learning stimulated by the other activities she undertook, often with her best friends, within the framework of her later informal education. As in the case of engaging readings, Bodichon and her friends shared their impressions via letters complemented with face-to-face conversations. As previous examples illustrate, they projected their 'embryonic' ideas in the act of letter-writing. In turn, expressing them via epistolary dialogues, which included contrasting viewpoints and giving feedback, they developed them further in a potentially never-ending circular pattern. Following this scheme, Bodichon and her friends reflected on a wide range of topics, which they intertwined with personal updates and personal enquiries.

Bodichon learned about political action from an early age from her father's activities as MP. When she was ten and he ran for Parliament for the constituency of Norwich she campaigned for him dressed in a 'sash of her father's colours, and paraded herself boldly before his constituents'.¹⁰⁰ Benjamin Smith was an active supporter of people's rights, free trade, and religious tolerance. Bodichon participated in some of the movements he backed, steered by her aunt Julia who, as noted in chapter 2, introduced Bodichon to female modes of political engagement. Bodichon also benefited from the regular gatherings her father organized in his London and Hastings homes. He invited the leading literary and political figures of the day: Harriet Martineau, Anna Jameson, Jacob Bright, Richard Cobden, and exiled political refugees coming from continental Europe such as Giuseppe Mazzini, Lajos Kossuth and Ledru Rollin. Bodichon participated in these debates from an early age.¹⁰¹ In line with *Bildung*'s notion of formative social intercourse, these animated gatherings provided her with the opportunity to discuss politics, international affairs, and economy with experts. Later in life she hosted her own parties, in both her English and Algerian homes. Like her friend, Parkes also benefited from stimulating family discussions. Her father had

⁹⁹ Humboldt, W. von (1792) 'An Attempt to Define the Legal Limits of Government', p.106, in Cowan, M. (ed.) (1963) pp.142-143.

¹⁰⁰ Burton, H. (1949) *Barbara Bodichon, 1827-1891* (London: J. Murray) p.14.

¹⁰¹ Hirsch, P. (1998) p.27.

been a Liberal politician and was acquainted with the major personalities of the age.

Stimulated by their parents' political involvement and family discussions, Bodichon and Parkes were regularly informed about parliamentary debates, which they also followed closely by reading newspapers. In line with previous factory acts, in 1847 Parliament discussed a series of legislations to regulate working conditions in British factories, including the possibility of providing state-funded elementary education for children. In 1820 Lord Henry Brougham presented in Parliament the Parish School Bill, which proposed that manufacturers establish their own schools. It required that schoolmasters be members of the Church of England and be appointed by the parish vestry. The bill was defeated and in 1843, a similar proposition was submitted, suggesting the provision of education for children aged 8 to 13 working in textile mills and workhouses. The bill, also defeated, required three hours of instruction a day and schoolmasters to be members of the Anglican Church. A conscience clause permitted nonconformist parents to withdraw their children from catechism and attendance at church.¹⁰² Along these lines, in 1847 a bill was presented proposing a similar state intervention in elementary education. Parkes commented on these parliamentary discussions in a letter to Bodichon dated 21 April 1847. In a burst of indignation she wrote:

With regard to the "Cat let out" if government tries to pass the education of dissenting children by Church masters, we shall have a gunpowder plot to blow Lord John sky high. It is a moral impossibility. I should as soon fear a renewal of Lettres de Cachet as the effectual carrying out of such a measure, considering the number of dissenters, their warmth, & the utter absurdity of the thing altogether. As to Church people, if they send their children to National school I can see no objection to the masters being in orders, that is entirely their own affair.

With regard to Jasper Wilson I agree in [what] he says concerning the priesthood, but not where he affirms persecution to the spirit of religion. Whether Jesus Christ be a Prophet, or only a second Plato he certainly did not wish to "send a sword"; & his code of morals in the Gospels is the best purest & most peaceable ever promulgated ... Mr Wilson has doubted himself into a mist if he doubts whether Christ meant us to be merciful active & happy, or to roast our Fellow Creatures. Do show that paper to Mrs. Howitt & ask her whether she with her deep admiration of the Jewish Teacher conceived

¹⁰² Barnard, H.C. (1961-1968) *A History of English Education: From 1760* (London: University of London Press) pp.65-66 and pp.103-104.

persecution to enter into his plan! What a letter you have brought on yourself dear Barbara, you will take care not to draw forth such an interminable thing I fear. ...

Your affectionate BRP

I have heard so little down here of the Education plan that I am very ignorant on the exact clauses of the Bill. If you have time write & tell me what you think.¹⁰³

Parkes' narrative is testimony to her confident exercise of her dialectic skills. Despite having 'heard so little' about the specificities of the bill, she put forward her stance against the state enforcing nonconformist children to receive Anglican religious instruction. She did so by echoing the liberal narrative of *laissez-faire* as a way of defending religious freedom against a law that subtly undermined the repeal of the Tests Acts (1828, 1829).¹⁰⁴ Associating the proposed bill with the *Ancien Régime* ('I should as soon fear a renewal of Lettres de Cachet as the effectual carrying out of such a measure'),¹⁰⁵ she situated herself along her contemporary progressive reformists. In the same way, Parkes put into play her knowledge of sacred history to confront author Jasper Wilson's 'persecution to the spirit of religion'. The result is a confident subject position that challenged gender notions of female modesty and 'blissful and protective' ignorance in women. Parkes projected this self-confidence into Bodichon when, underlying 'you' in her writing, asked her friend for her own opinion – informed, valuable and trustworthy.

Bodichon's letters to Parkes are no longer extant. Parkes' narrative ('you will take care not to draw forth such an interminable thing I fear') suggests that Bodichon recommended or sent an article on this parliamentary discussion to Parkes and asked for her opinion on the particular position of a social commentator (or politician) – Jasper Wilson. Parkes' last remark ('If you have time write & tell me what you think') also suggests that Bodichon, following the code of reciprocity, in turn wrote another letter answering Parkes' doubts and expressing her own impressions. We can imagine that like her friend, Bodichon

¹⁰³ Parkes to Bodichon, 21 April 1847, GCPP Parkes 5/8.

¹⁰⁴ The Tests Acts were a series of penal laws that imposed civil disabilities on Nonconformists and Catholics. Most notably, in order to be eligible for public employment individuals had to profess to the Anglican Church. The requirement to receive the sacrament in order to qualify for office was repealed in 1828. The civil rights of Catholics were fully recognised in the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829.

¹⁰⁵ During the *Ancien Régime*, Lettres de cachet were written to transmit the orders made by the king.

also confidently exercised her critical thinking. Embracing her grandfather's and father's parliamentary efforts in favour of religious freedom, Bodichon most probably shared Parkes' viewpoint against compulsory Anglican religious teaching. In turn, this reply that is no longer extant fed Parkes' viewpoint – 'embrionically' put forward in the above letter (21 April 1847). Widening the circle of friendship interaction, Parkes encouraged Bodichon to recommend the reading to Mary Howitt in turn – which illustrates Humboldt's idea that one's individuated outlook (here Bodichon's) serve as other men's variety of situations as leading to individuality.

In 1847 the Parliament eventually passed the Ten Hours Act, which limited the working hours of women and children between the ages of 13 and 18 in British factories to 10 hours per day. On 25 June, writing from Malvern (Worcestershire), where she was probably visiting relatives with her family, Parkes commented in a letter to Bodichon:

I think the short hours Bill has passed since we met, I should like to know your opinion, I half fancy it is better to leave these things to themselves like little Bopeep's sheep, but cannot make up my mind. Leisure is such a priceless gain.¹⁰⁶

Bearing in mind that the two friends exchanged letters extremely frequently, the date of this second extant letter suggests that Bodichon and Parkes followed the development of the parliamentary debates and exchanged letters until its final resolution. These epistolary conversations between April and June may have been intertwined with face-to-face encounters. All in all, Parkes' letters to Bodichon reveal the dialogical nature of *Bildung* – both hers and Bodichon's – and bring to light the significance of letter-writing and letter-exchange as sources of knowledge and critical thinking.

During the late 1840s a series of political upheavals swayed France, Germany, Austria and Italy. 'Revolutionaries' demanded a mixture of democratic, liberal, socialist and nationalist rights. In France, in February 1848 King Louis Philippe was overthrown and the Second Republic was established. Howitt, having read the news in the papers, remarked to Bodichon: 'Is it not some way a relief to you to see the "Times" announcing the belief that Louis Philippe's and Russian and Louis Napoleon's gold has been filling the pockets of the Ultras!!!'

¹⁰⁶ Parkes to Bodichon, Malvern, 25 June 1847, GCPP Parkes 5/10.

['ultrarepublicans']'.¹⁰⁷ Some months later, the Austrian Empire of the Habsburgs began to be threatened by revolutionary movements led by the different peoples that constituted it: Hungarians, Romanians, Slovenes, Czechs, Slovaks, Serbs, Croats, and Italians. In March 1848 Bodichon commented to Parkes:

What a difficult task you have set me! To write a dissertation on the times! I could not do it I am sure – but I have a strong faith in this great movement [the 1848 revolutions], tho' it is blackened by so much absurdity & injustice. I am so rejoiced that the Austrian despotism is overthrown I hope now that the age of tyrants is past, the horrid past of the movement is the insane destruction of machinery railroad steam boats &c, it is not sad!¹⁰⁸

This letter suggests that, in a previous letter (not extant) Parkes asked Bodichon to write a short essay for publication. In response to her friend's proposition, Bodichon put forward her views on the nature and development of events in continental Europe. Although she pointed out its excesses ('much absurdity & injustice'), in her narrative Bodichon expressed her 'strong faith' in the movement. She did so by implicitly comparing 'Austrian despotism' with the democratic, balanced and desirable British parliamentary monarchy. This is a belief she shared with her middle-class counterparts, including her father. A letter Bodichon sent to James Buchanan (now living in South Africa) some months later implies that her views were informed by her father's political outlook:

I must begin with Papa and tell you the news of everyone. He is quite well, and looks so, and is in very good spirits, but thinks the prospects of Europe dark. As politics form a great part of our existence here, the bloody scenes which are going on over the water often make him and all of us very melancholy, though we all believe in the progress of the people, yet the democrats are acting savagely, brutally. It is a great struggle between kings and people, between the Old Ways and New. We are always saying, 'What strange times!' For there is nothing to compare in strangeness, nothing by which one can guess what will come next. Papa reads the newspapers and gives us his opinions and the benefit of his experience upon all the great questions at home and abroad.¹⁰⁹

In the previous examples I highlighted how Parkes (and most probably Bodichon too) exercised her critical thinking and developed her individual outlook.

¹⁰⁷ Howitt to Bodichon, [1848], Beaky, letter 8.

¹⁰⁸ Bodichon to Parkes, [March 1848], GCPP Parkes 5/170.

¹⁰⁹ Bodichon to James Buchanan, Pelham Crescent, 10 October 1848, GCPP, Buchanan, B.I. (ed.) (1923) p.17.

In her letters to Parkes (March 1848) and Buchanan (10 October 1848) Bodichon seems to be absorbing 'passively' Smith's outlook in terms of liberal politics. As I will further discuss throughout chapters 6, 7 and 8, Benjamin Smith's 'influence' on Bodichon's outlook resonates with *Bildung's* underlying tension between individuality and normativity. In an essay written in 1823, Humboldt points out the inevitability of influence:

his [man's] nature is predetermined by all who have preceded him, and shaped by all who exist around him, so that even the operations of whatever truly and absolutely free powers he may have are variously limited and determined.¹¹⁰

In line with Humboldt's idea of the inevitability of influence, Bodichon seems to be absorbing 'passively' Smith's political views. This 'passive' mimesis runs against *Bildung's* idea of critically engaging with input (here her family's tradition of progressive political commitment). Yet, as Humboldt highlights, this influence seems impossible to totally evade. This (unavoidable) lack of critical engagement with 'influence' and the occasional partial self-alienation in Bodichon's *Bildung* are themes that I will examine in subsequent chapters.

Parkes most probably read the news on the European affairs in newspapers and may have discussed the situation in the continent with her father. Joseph Parkes was slightly more conservative than Benjamin Smith. He did not welcome any radical thinkers as Smith did for example. Whereas Smith sympathized with revolutionary causes in Europe and welcomed its exiled leaders in his home, Joseph Parkes distrusted their background, calling them 'agitators and Revolutionists by profession'.¹¹¹ In her reply to Bodichon's letter, Parkes put forward her personal views on the political situation in Europe. Moving away from her father's stance, she commented:

I quite agree with you that whatever becomes of France, Germany & Italy will have great reason to rejoice in the times. Indeed I think it is in those two countries alone that real progress will be made yet. France is a great Minor, the only thing is this, that it is better she should educate herself in Freedom than under Louis Philippe. It is just like your duck in the pond when a child. She may get into bloodshed

¹¹⁰ Humboldt, W. von (1823) 'To What Extent May one Judge the Cultural Level of the American Natives from their Linguistic Remains?', p.29, in Cowan, M. (ed.) (1963) p.70.

¹¹¹ Joseph Parkes to Parkes, n.d., GCPP Parkes 4/24.

& trouble as you did into mud by having her own way, but she is more likely to gain experience & self-government in the end.¹¹²

Parkes' narrative illustrates Humboldt's idea that resemblance (here, with Bodichon) and friction (here, presumably with her father) lead to a more precise self-fashioning.

Bodichon and Parkes went to hear public lectures by literary figures such as Ralph Waldo Emerson,¹¹³ and attended lectures at the Royal Polytechnic Institution at Regent Street, London (today University of Westminster).¹¹⁴ They also visited exhibitions at different art galleries.¹¹⁵ Paying regular visits to family and friends was a common practice in middle-class households. As I will further outline in the next chapter, Bodichon travelled constantly within England to stay some days or weeks at her relatives'. In London Bodichon and her friends also attended social events such as theatre plays and balls, where they observed the codes of polite society. In their letters these friends confided doubts about unwritten social customs and exchanged their views on decorum and courtesy rituals. Bodichon once brought up the topic of 'coming out':

Louisa Hill has written me a dozen letters to go to their party on the 19th & stay with them & she is to "come out" & perhaps I may go up on Tuesday if Papa goes. Bye the bye what does "coming out" signify? Is it "ready to marry"?¹¹⁶

In reply Parkes commented disdainfully:

I thought Louisa Hill was out long ago, are you out? I am not sure whether I am or not. I once went to a large grown up ball which I suppose constituted the Rubicon, & abominably stupid it was too.¹¹⁷

Parkes disliked opulent dinners and tight and fashionable etiquette codes. In May 1850 she embarked on one of her regular trips to Birmingham. There she visited her family and friends and attended social gatherings and parties with her parents. Half annoyed half resigned, she reported to Bodichon:

Here I go out to small parties among my parents' set. Abominably stupid; they sit, 20 of them perhaps, & talk, they are not intellectual enough to make it interesting; they are educated, but not

¹¹² Parkes to Bodichon, 70 Marine Parade, [Brighton], 30 March 1848, GCPP Parkes 5/21.

¹¹³ Parkes to Bodichon, 3 June 1848, GCPP Parkes 5/26.

¹¹⁴ Parkes to Mary Swainson, Hampstead, 21 August 1848, GCPP Parkes 3/18.

¹¹⁵ Parkes to Bodichon, London, 16 December 1849, 5/41.

¹¹⁶ Bodichon to Parkes, [January 1847], GCPP Parkes 5/163.

¹¹⁷ Parkes to Bodichon, 17 January 1847, GCPP Parkes 5/5.

intellectual. As to playing games, & hearing funny & merry they are far too genteel for that. Birmingham itself is full of interest & wonder & occupation, but the social meetings of the upper class are dreadful. The ladies & gentlemen are so distinct, so markedly of different sexes. The most pleasant young man is a spectacled Martineau- When I go into the rooms I long to set them acting or playing some games I hold my tongue my dear friend; & utter no heterodox wickedness, & sit nullified in my blue silk dress.¹¹⁸

In her letter to Bodichon Parkes puts forward her opinion bluntly about her social life in Birmingham. She accompanies her parents to 'small parties among my parents' set', whom she considers 'educated, but not intellectual'. For they 'talk' but, 'not [being] intellectual enough', they do not have 'interesting' conversations. '[F]ar too genteel' for 'playing games, & hearing funny & merry' stories, their parties are 'dreadful'. Equally she deplores their strict observance of manners that prevent men and women from socializing naturally and forces them to be each 'so distinct' and 'so markedly of different sexes'. As a result, despite the 'interest & wonder & occupation' in Birmingham, these 'social meetings' are 'Abominably stupid'.

Parkes' narrative is a vivid illustration of the workings of epistolary education. Exposed to social intercourse as part of her later informal education, she forges her subjectivity against her parents' and their friends' principles and practices. While born into the Parkes' household and thus influenced by its beliefs and customs, she individualizes her subject position by mobilising a series of discourses. (This critical positioning vis-à-vis her parents' contrasts with Bodichon's seemingly 'passive' absorption of certain progressive and liberal ideas within the Smith household). Though Parkes is forced to play the game by holding her tongue sitting in her 'blue silk dress', in her epistolary narrative she distances herself from 'the upper class' (her parents' set), which, implicitly, she associates with excess and frivolity. Simultaneously, she identifies herself with a rank lower to 'the upper class' and associates herself with games, plays, and 'funny & merry' stories. Referring to these activities is a conspiratorial wink to Bodichon because these are the pastimes in which Bodichon indulged in her house and to which Parkes was invited when she was in Hastings and London. To all appearances, in her epistolary narrative Parkes seems completely 'nullified' in this environment.

¹¹⁸ Parkes to Bodichon, 30 May 1850, GCPP Parkes 5/48.

Yet, reflecting the kind of defiant attitude she and Bodichon projected in some of their letters (discussed in chapters 6 and 7), Parkes seems to take certain delight at her self-imposed marginalization as an ‘outsider’. Her at first sight problematic ‘heterodox wickedness’ is in the end transformed into an attribute that permits her to be the kind of intellectual, interesting and joyful person she finds lacking among her parents’ acquaintances. In turn, by sharing with Bodichon this ambiguous subject position she projects in her narrative, Parkes includes her friend in the kind of intellectual, interesting and joyful people she values.

By expressing her dissatisfaction in her letter addressed to Bodichon, Parkes sought the understanding of her confidante. Eventually, her opinions on polite society fell on sympathising ears. Bodichon once admitted to her maternal aunt Dorothy Longden:

I am one of the cracked people of the world, and I like to herd with the cracked such as A.[nna] M.[ary] H.[owitt] and B.[essy] R.[ayner] P.[arkes], queer Americans, democrats, socialists, artists, poor devils or angels; and am never happy in an English genteel family life. I try to do it like other people, but I long always to be off on some wild adventure, or long to lecture on a tub in St Giles, or go to see the Mormons, or ride off into the interior on horseback alone and leave the world for a month. I want to see what sort of world this God’s world is.¹¹⁹

Undergoing the kind of auto-marginalization Parkes articulates in her letter, Bodichon distances herself from the ‘English genteel family life’ and identifies herself with ‘the cracked people of the world’ such as her friends Parkes and Howitt. Like Parkes, she tries to conform but acquiescence makes her unhappy. Through *Bildung*’s exposure to the world and its difference, Bodichon forges her individuality. The friction that emerges when she interacts with opposing and congenial viewpoints permits her to shape an individuated subjectivity like the one she articulates in this epistolary narrative.

School visiting was another informal activity that provided stimulating sources of critical thinking. Visiting the homes of poor families to teach them hygienic and moral habits was a respectable activity that many leisured middle-class women did. Some ventured to visit ragged schools, reformatories, and

¹¹⁹ Bodichon to Dorothy Longden, [late 1850s], quoted in Burton, H. (1949) p.92.

prisons.¹²⁰ Interested in education, Bodichon and Parkes regularly visited schools, including during their voyages abroad. On 15 December 1847 Bodichon visited a school with her father and her sister Bella. Writing to Parkes, she expressed her disapproval of using the Bible as the only source of teaching. Intertwined with the usual updating on her doings, she wrote to her friend, angry and disappointed:

Today Papa Bell & I went to the same school at Westfield that you
[went] to with us, I examined their books & found as usual Bible,
Testament, Bible & so on, is it not miserable & heart breaking that
they will only just teach what it is incomprehensive & nothing more.
I hope you will write
Yrs affectly
Bar LS¹²¹

The kind of doctrinal rote learning Bodichon describes in this letter was alien to her own experience. She learned and discussed the teachings of the Bible through stimulating games, music and country walks both at her father's infant school in London and at home when James Buchanan acted as tutor to the Leigh Smith children. As I will discuss in chapter 7, Bodichon's epistolary narrative stands for a snapshot of her philanthropic becoming, where she forged her philanthropic outlook (partially) in dialogue with her correspondents. Following the letter-exchange social code of reciprocity, Parkes replied the following day with a brief comment on the question of Bible teaching in schools:

I agree with you about the school (not that the whole of the Bible is incomprehensible to children far from it) but much is, & I think it absurd to give them nothing else. Moreover I greatly object to the Bible being made a humdrum class book.¹²²

Bodichon's discontent with the practice of rote learning of the Bible in charitable schools triggered a series of letters where she and her friend exchanged their impressions and commented on each other's stance. Bodichon's letters are no longer extant. Reminiscent of the methodological significance of 'letters to', a letter from Parkes replying to Bodichon's further comments on religious teaching suggests the continuation of this epistolary conversation.¹²³

¹²⁰ See for example Prochaska, F.K. (1980) *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).

¹²¹ Bodichon to Parkes, 15 December 1847, GCPP Parkes 5/164.

¹²² Parkes to Bodichon, 16 December 1847, GCPP Parkes 5/17.

¹²³ Parkes to Bodichon, 24 December 1847, GCPP Parkes 5/18.

Ultimately, true to her viewpoint, seven years later Bodichon conceived her infant school, Portman Hall School, as a secular philanthropic institution. As she expressed in her report on the state of charitable schools for the Taunton Commission (1865), in her school she sought to promote ‘toleration, forbearance, and charity’ among ‘children of different denominations being together’.¹²⁴ Every morning the lessons started with a reading of a poem or a parable from the Bible.¹²⁵ In Portman Hall she encouraged teachers to stimulate the aesthetic, imaginative and reasoning powers of children and their physical fitness –the pivotal elements of *Bildung*’s holistic understanding of education. As Hirsch writes, Bodichon’s ‘desire for a healthy life, physically intellectually and spiritually, was grounded in her conviction of human need for connection with nature’ – outlined above.¹²⁶ She took the Portman Hall children on trips out of school, visiting museums, to widen their range of cultural experience. Like Humboldt’s idea of school as the most favourable environment to gather students from different social background, she founded her school as a coeducational institution where pupils from different social, national and religious backgrounds studied together and learned toleration. When she closed her school in 1863, Bodichon turned down Elizabeth Whitehead Malleson’s invitation to act as principal of her envisaged College for Working Women. According to Hirsch, she did so on the grounds that Malleson’s associate, F.D. Maurice, ‘was too evangelical for her linking’.¹²⁷ Ten years later Bodichon established a night school in her Sussex cottage, Scalands Gate, where she offered secular reading and writing evening classes for working-class men instead.¹²⁸

The examples I have presented in this section show that Bodichon and her friends discussed in letters a wide range of topics, including national politics, religion and social etiquette. They show how Bodichon’s later educational

¹²⁴ Submission to ‘Answers to the Circular of Questions’ of the Education Commission (1858), *Parliamentary Papers*, Vol. V, pp.103-105.

¹²⁵ Hirsch, P. (1998) p.76.

¹²⁶ Ibid, p.37.

¹²⁷ Ibid, p.82.

¹²⁸ Ibid, p.298. Bodichon faced an acute dilemma when Emily Davies brought to the foreground the question of the religious allegiance of the women’s college they were envisaging (later Girton College, Cambridge). Davies considered that Cambridge University would be more willing to recognise their institution if they were nominally Anglican. But Bodichon’s father and grandfather had fought against religious disabilities in Parliament and several members of her family supported secular educational institutions such as the Westminster Infant School and University College, London. On that occasion Bodichon gave in and accepted to donate £1,000 to encourage other contributions, Ibid, pp.247-248.

activities triggered a series of epistolary conversations where she and her friends projected and forged their personal outlooks. This epistolary articulation of subjectivity took place within the framework of Bodichon's 'peculiar education' and ran parallel to other sources of learning and critical thinking such as her painting activities, her father's political and literary salons, and her social life more broadly.

Conclusion

In this chapter I explored how Bodichon acquired the knowledge and critical thinking elements of *Bildung* by means of her 'peculiar' and epistolary education. Establishing links between *Bildung* and the Unitarian philosophy of education, I argued that Bodichon's education (and the educational approach that underpins her Portman Hall School) intersects with *Bildung*. In line with Humboldt's wish to provide a wide-ranging education to stimulate each individual's energy, Bodichon received a comprehensive and thorough instruction from her governess, private tutors (especially James Buchanan and Philip Kingsford), and painting masters. In the context of this *Bildung*-like educational scheme, I examined the role of letter-writing and letter-exchange in her development of the first dimension of *Bildung* I highlight in this thesis: knowledge acquisition and critical thinking. Based on the epistolary dialogues exchanged between Bodichon and her friends, I argued that letters acted as forums for intersubjective self-fashioning triggered by readings and other stimulating activities she undertook with her friends during her later informal education. Following the letter-exchange social code of reciprocity, Bodichon and her friends recommended and lent each other books and articles. They expressed their viewpoints and gave each other constructive feedback and encouragement. To illustrate this aspect of *Bildung*, I examined how three best-selling works (Tennyson's 'The Princess', Mill's *Principles of Political Economy*, and Martineau's *The History of the Thirty Years*) set into motion a network of epistolary dialogues between Bodichon and her friends which triggered a conversation on women's education and female achievement. In the second part of this chapter I also argued that the activities Bodichon and her friends undertook as part of their later education also stimulated their learning and exercise of critical thinking. Activities such as family discussions, school visiting

and socializing triggered conversations on national politics, international affairs, religion and social customs. I argued that, ultimately, in the process of her epistolary learning, Bodichon forged her subjectivity – her critical (feminist) outlook. Putting into play the principle of narrative relationality, in this chapter I illustrated the methodological significance of ‘letters to’ as sources of knowledge about the intersubjective nature of *Bildung* and the simultaneous development of *Bildung* by Bodichon and her female correspondents.

According to Humboldt’s *Bildung*, it is through a process of self-alienation and critical mimesis that results from free social intercourse that man fashions his individuality within the heterogeneity of the outer world. Having put forward the first dimension of Bodichon’s ‘epistolary education’, in the following chapter I focus on this process of self-alienation and critical mimesis. Putting into play the second dimension of *Bildung* that I highlight in this thesis – identity – I explore the significance of travelling and epistolary travel writing in Bodichon’s process of carving out her individuality.

6 Identity

Introduction

In an unpublished essay, Wilhelm von Humboldt highlights the education that is to be derived from travel:

travel introduces the mind directly to the various situations of the various countries, familiarizes it with their customs and their way of life (even if one already knows all about them) and is even useful if one goes to a place quite different from that which one wishes to study, because it further one's skill of adapting oneself to many different external circumstances. This is why travel is after all indispensable ...¹

Drawing on Humboldt's idea of travel as sources of learning, in this chapter I discuss the role of travelling and the act of writing travel letters in Barbara Bodichon's identity formation as a female traveller at the intersection of her activities as an artist, feminist and philanthropist. In *Bildung's* conceptual framework, I discuss the significance of travelling and epistolary travel writing in Bodichon's process of carving out her individuality. As discussed in chapter 3, *Bildung* requires that individuals plunge in the unknown, adopt an open attitude towards new knowledge, and incorporate it into their sense of selves. It is this self-alienation which leads them to a critical engagement with the world – to adopt a reflective attitude towards the existing society and, eventually, to act as self-determining agents (as I will examine in chapter 7). In this chapter I suggest that, conforming to *Bildung's* idea of forging one's individuality in interaction with the outer world through social interplay, travel letters acted as forums where Bodichon fashioned her identity in dialogue with her correspondents. Drawing on Frédéric Regard's and Kristi Siegel's view of self-refashioning as a result of the encounter with the Other, I argue that travelling – her nomadic lifestyle, as I will show – acted as one source of difference through which Bodichon alienated herself. Retaining her independence as a subject, she critically incorporated the unknown into her sense of self, which she articulated in her travel writing.

¹ Humboldt, W. von (1796-1797) 'The Eighteenth Century', p.81f, in Cowan, M. (ed.) (1963) *Humanist Without Portfolio: An Anthology of the Writings of Wilhelm von Humboldt* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press) p.127.

Structured around the thematic axis of Bodichon's epistolary self-projections as an intrepid and politically committed artist and as an 'expert' in aesthetic and social questions, I explore how Bodichon gave written expression to her self-alienation in her travel letters via her epistolary persona conditioned by the addressee. My argument is that she verbalized a versatile self-projection through the epistolary medium by virtue of the multiplicity of correspondents to whom she wrote. In the process, in line with *Bildung's* requirement to adopt a critical attitude to society, letters acted as a space where Bodichon adopted, reappropriated and challenged normativity, for instance in terms of dominant discourses on bourgeois femininity. In *Bildung's* conceptual framework, the wide-ranging epistolary situations to which Bodichon was exposed stimulated the self-alienation she went through as a result of travelling – her nomadic lifestyle – and thus fostered the further shaping of her individuality. In this chapter I outline that, however, reflecting *Bildung's* normative underpinnings, Bodichon's process of self-alienation left unchallenged certain prejudices. Her resulting standpoint was caught in certain classist and colonialist assumptions.²

6.1 *Bildung's* Self-Alienation in Bodichon's Travel Letters

Bodichon was a lifelong inveterate traveller. She visited three different continents and lived 6 months in Algeria and 6 months in England for more than twenty years. Within Britain, she was in constant movement: she lived in her three homes in England (in London, Sussex and Cornwall) from where she carried out her feminist, philanthropic, and artistic activities; she visited her relatives in their different houses in the south of England and in Derbyshire; and she spent short periods of time at her friends' places and in health resorts. During her childhood Bodichon travelled with her family. Loosely following the tradition of the Grand Tour, Benjamin Smith took his children on day excursions and holiday trips, at home and abroad, by train, boat or travelling in his eight-passenger carriage. As Brian Dolan writes of Georgian ladies travelling around Continental

² This chapter draws on Simon-Martin, M. (forthcoming 2013) 'Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon's Travel Letters: Performative Self-Formation in Epistolary Narratives', in Barclay, K. and Richardson, S. (eds) 'Performing the Self: Women's Lives in Historical Perspective' (Special Issue) *Women's History Review*, 22 (2).

Europe, these family trips provided Bodichon with further education, entertainment and physical exercise.³ These trips involved practical lessons and guided Bodichon through the intricacies of life from direct experience. As briefly discussed in chapter 5, during her teenage years Bodichon went on painting expeditions with a view to improving her drawing and colouring techniques. Later in life she embarked on sketching expeditions in the Isle of Wight, Cornwall, the Lake District, and Wales. Belonging to that group of privileged female travellers who had the means to document her voyages, some of Bodichon's experiences are verbalized in her letters.⁴

In line with Nestor's interpretation of Bodichon's travelling (described in chapter 2), Bodichon expressed in her letters the transformation she underwent as a result of travelling. As she wrote to Caroline Dall (an American transcendentalist writer and women's rights supporter) after her honeymoon trip: 'You have no idea how very conservative England appears after America. I must say I see things with a different eye after [my] American experience'.⁵ Conceiving her nomadic existence – her travelling understood in a broad sense – as a defining characteristic of Bodichon's lifestyle, my suggestion is that her travelling stands for one means through which Bodichon undertook her self-alienation. Drawing on Gayatri Spivak's claim that the 'empire messes with identity', in his introduction to *British Narratives of Exploration: Case Studies of the Self and Other*, Frédéric Regard suggests that 'the colonizing subject's identity, too, is distorted in the process of encounter'.⁶ In the same vein, in her introduction to *Gender, Genre, & Identity in Women's Travel Writing*, editor Kristi Siegel states that, whether or not it is put into written words, travelling elicits 'identity upheaval'.⁷ Ruth Jenkins takes Siegel's statement a step further and claims that, in their letters, journals, travelogues, and essays, female travellers articulated 'autobiographical quests and definitions of selves less possible in England'.⁸

³ Dolan, B. (2002) *Ladies of the Grand Tour* (London: Flamingo) pp.11-12, p.25, p.27, and p.32.

⁴ Siegel, K. (2004) 'Intersections: Women's Travel and Theory', in Siegel, K. (ed.) *Gender, Genre, and Identity in Women's Travel Writing* (New York: Peter Lang) p.2.

⁵ Bodichon to Caroline Dall, Ladies Reading Rooms, 14 Princes Street, Cavendish Square, 19 September 1858, Massachusetts Historical Society, Caroline Wells Healey Dall Papers.

⁶ Regard, F. (ed.) (2009) *British Narratives of Exploration. Case Studies of the Self and Other* (London: Pickering and Chatto) p.4.

⁷ Siegel, K. (2004) p.7.

⁸ Jenkins, R.Y. (2004) 'The Gaze of the Victorian Woman Traveler: Spectacles and Phenomena', in Siegel, K. (ed.) p.15.

Resonating with Regard's and Siegel's view of self-refashioning as a result of the encounter with the Other, my argument is that, as outlined by Humboldt in the quotation above, Bodichon's constant mobility provided her with a wide variety of settings through which she extended towards the unknown and incorporated it into her sense of being. In turn she articulated this meaning-creation effected by her nomadic lifestyle in her travel letters. That is, in consonance with *Bildung*'s idea of 'plunging' into the unknown, letters functioned as forums where she articulated her self-alienation – as a space where she made sense of encountering the difference through which she individualized her subjectivity.

Bodichon's epistolary self-projection as a female traveller is slightly disruptive of current understandings of travel writing. She did travel abroad, including North-America, Canada, Europe and North-Africa. To a certain extent, her travel writing is comparable to the works by renowned female travellers such as her friend Marianne North. In her letters, some published in article format, Bodichon expressed what it meant for her to be a female traveller – to be exposed to the unknown – in the form of descriptions of her sightseeing tours, painting sessions and anecdotes. In addition, she gave voice to her impressions as a (foreign) visitor by writing detailed accounts of cultural sites and local customs as well as practical information about accommodation and travelling.

Given that she was constantly moving from place to place, both around Britain and outside the country, her travel letters also reveal her voice as a nomadic Victorian. Bodichon's epistolary travel writing acted as a space where she created meaning from her nomadic lifestyle and reconciled her fragmented self. In her travel letters, Bodichon worked out her self-understanding not only as a woman living between her Algerian and English homes but also as a leisured person who regularly rented temporary accommodation in seaside and countryside resorts and frequently stayed at her relatives' and friends' places. In *Bildung*'s sense, Bodichon articulated in her personal correspondence the process of self-alienation she went through by virtue of her mobility and travelling.

Letter-exchange permitted Bodichon to bridge the gap that distance created between her and the people for whom she cared and the social projects in which she was engaged. In her letter she enquired after the health, doings and whereabouts of her loved ones, asked for and conveyed information about common acquaintances, gave accounts of her own routine and endeavours, and

informed about when and where she was travelling so that letters could be forwarded. Likewise, Bodichon managed to run her philanthropic projects and to be part of the women's rights campaigns by means of letter-exchange. In her letters she included articles for *The English Woman's Journal* and the Kensington Society⁹ and enclosed cheques to finance campaigns. Moreover, she made use of letters to gain support and raise money for her social endeavours, for example to set up a fund for American Dr Elizabeth Blackwell to open the medical profession to women in England. Ultimately, in the process of making sense of her nomadic lifestyle, she carved out her epistolary identity as a traveller at the intersection of her feminist, philanthropist, and artistic activities. In *Bildung's* terms, she shaped her individuality.

Bodichon's projection of herself as a female traveller in her letters – the epistolary articulation of the *Bildung* process of self-alienation effected by travelling – was determined by the recipient she wrote to. As dialogical acts, letters intrinsically involve an addressee: the epistolary "you", which determines the epistolary narrative strategies adopted by the epistolary "I" (see chapter 4). Bodichon adapted her epistolary narrative to each of her addressees, developing multiple epistolary "I"s. Thus, she presented herself as a traveller, a professional artist, and an engaged feminist campaigner and social reformer in slightly different guises. In *Bildung's* terms, her epistolary narratives stand for a distinct articulation of her self-alienation determined by the addressee to whom she wrote. Her textual strategies consisted in bringing out certain aspects of her subjectivity and concealing others. That is, Bodichon was constituted by numerous identities: a leisured traveller, a woman, an artist, a philanthropist, an educationist, a feminist, a neighbour, an English citizen, a daughter, a wife, a friend, a member of the British and French community of expatriates in Algeria and so on. Delving through layers of her self, she acted out – constructed and reconstructed – her identity. In her epistolary narratives she 'played' with these aspects of her self and presented different combinations and 'versions' of them – sometimes these were only subtly distinct. In virtually all her epistolary travel writing, Bodichon wrote in a lively style. Yet, she adapted the format and the tone in which she approached recipients appropriately so as not to break social codes

⁹ The Kensington Society was a ladies-only discussion group started in London in 1865. Immediately after its foundation it became the location from which the first organized women's suffrage campaign was launched. Bodichon was a founding member and one of the leaders of the campaign.

of letter-exchange – here to respond to the code of reciprocity in accordance with the nature of the relationship between letter-writer and addressee. Through doing so, she projected nuanced portraits of herself. Her multiple epistolary “I”s represent nuanced articulations of her *Bildung*’s self-alienation – how she incorporated the unknown experienced through travelling into her sense of being.

In turn, in accordance with *Bildung*’s notion of critical mimesis (the requirement to adopt a critical attitude to society), the process of verbalizing an epistolary self-image and simultaneous to the act of communicating, letters acted as a space where Bodichon individuated her subjectivity as a female traveller. Letters acted as a space where, mobilizing on-going discourses, she adopted, challenged, and reappropriated gender normativity. Bodichon’s epistolary travel narratives enact the desire for freedom of movement, across geographical domains and across gender and social expectations, as expressed in the letter she sent to her aunt Dorothy Longden quoted in the previous chapter (‘I am one of the cracked people of the world...’). As I discussed in the methodology chapter, Bodichon individuated her subjectivity in her epistolary narratives within norms of cultural intelligibility. As noted in the previous chapter in reference to her (feminist) outlook, in her travel letters Bodichon engaged critically with discursive traditions, including gender normativity. That is, in her travel letters Bodichon negotiated her persona as a woman traveller. In her epistolary travel writing, by assuming ‘masculine’ attributes and roles, Bodichon underwent what some authors have termed ‘gender transvestism’.¹⁰

Bodichon’s epistolary challenge of bourgeois femininity was prompted by the versatile articulation of her identity. That is, the act of projecting nuanced self-presentations in accordance with each addressee permitted her to explore her subjectivity as a traveller, feminist, artist, and philanthropist. Each set of correspondences sent to one particular person created a new scenario where she ventured into different self-images. Writing to such a variety of epistolary “you” maximized her opportunities for identity resignification. In *Bildung*’s terms, the variety of addressees to whom she wrote further stimulated Bodichon’s articulation of her self-alienation as effected by travelling.

¹⁰ Jenkins, R.Y. (2004) p.16 and p.26.

6.2 An Intrepid and Politically Committed Artist

Siegel, Jenkins and Sukanya Banerjee note that, (unescorted) travel was considered inappropriate for a lady and that, in order to deflect criticism, female travellers employed a narrative stance that maintained a rigorous code of propriety. In their travel writing they strained the conventions of femininity but without breaking them. For example they began their narrative with an apology for engaging in such improper an activity and justified it in terms of enduring the voyage for the needs of others: as a colonial wife or as the daughter of a man who left work unfinished. Their travelling provoking responses of paternalism, pity and apprehension, female travellers sought to 'distance themselves from the "horror" they in fact embodied'.¹¹ Others continually strove to demarcate themselves from 'the narrative liberties exercised by male travel writers', authoring themselves as distinctly female travel writers instead.¹²

In contrast, without losing her caste as a 'lady' but going against gendered expectations and without self-justification, Bodichon invariably projected herself as an intrepid tourist voyaging out of personal curiosity and for the sake of pleasure – an attitude marked primarily as masculine. Thus for example, in November 1856, Benjamin Smith and his three daughters set out on a voyage across France towards Algeria. This voyage was to change Bodichon's course of life. For there she met her future husband. Her first encounter with Algiers was thrilling for her. She spent her time wandering around the city, its alleys and bazaars. She socialized with the English and French community – expatriates and tourists like her – and was in contact with the local population. Bodichon was simply struck by the breathtaking exoticism of Algeria. She transmitted her enthusiasm in her letters to her friends in England. She described its striking picturesqueness to Parkes and a sense of exiting adventure is palpable in her letters:

So away we go – Pater, Bell, Nanny and I along the covered Bazaar
dimly lighted into a street where we see a white mosque dimly
against blue evening, here a fountain, there a clump of red and white
Arabs huddled together round the low arch door of a coffee shop.
We pass some Sinbads and Oh so many one eyed Calenders, more
than seven. This is really an Arabian night! Now we dive into a dark

¹¹ Siegel, K. (2004) pp.3-4; Jenkins, R.Y. (2004) p.17 and p.19.

¹² Banerjee, S. (2004) 'Lady Mary Montagu and the "Boundaries" of Europe', in Siegel, K. (ed.) p.36.

arched passage, with mysterious doors leading into darker passages. Now we turn into one and suddenly find ourselves in a real Arabian Court open to the sky with Moorish arches, 2 tiers, white alabaster, but of course dimly lighted, a fountain in the middle with [?] and some creeping plants trained from the centre by strings to the upper gallery. This is a delicious place after all our trials by sea & land, quite enchanting.¹³

Bodichon's confident self-projection as an adventurous tourist runs counter to the type of travel warning discourse embedded in literary and medical texts that Siegel highlights in 'Women's Travel and the Rhetoric of Peril: It is Suicide to be Abroad'. Confusing women's mobility with questions of morality, this literature prescribed what travel was culturally sanctioned.¹⁴ Against these warnings, in the above letter excerpt Bodichon projected herself as a curious and adventurous tourist by turning Algiers into a mysterious picturesque place ('we dive into a dark arched passage, with mysterious doors leading into darker passages', 'dimly lighted' bazaars, 'enchanting' scenes reminiscent of the Arabian Nights). That is, she translated her contact with the Other into a subject position that drew on a feminist understanding of female travelling and on popular visions of the 'East' mediated by secondary literature¹⁵ – which she circulated among her readership and to which she contributed to take root in the popular imaginary. As I will further discuss in the following section, Bodichon's contributing to discourses on Otherness attests to her self-alienation as partially undertaken.

A letter from Marian Evans to her childhood friend Sara Hennell dated 16 April 1857 suggests that Bodichon also wrote a letter to Evans and George Lewes expressing her excitement at discovering Algeria. Following a discursive chain, in this letter Evans reproduces the picturesque vision of Algeria mediated by the first-hand experience Bodichon underwent (expressed in her letter to Parkes):

We have wonderful descriptions from Barbara Smith of the glorious scenery and strange picturesque life she finds in Algiers. It really seems an easy way of bringing the tropics near to one's imagination, to take that short journey. In less than a week's easy travelling you are among palms and Arabs and wild horses and lions and panthers,

¹³ Bodichon to Parkes, [Algeria], [November 1856], Cambridge University, Girton College Archives, Girton College Personal Papers (GCPP) Parkes 5/175.

¹⁴ Siegel, K. (2004a) 'Women's Travel and the Rhetoric of Peril: It is Suicide to be Abroad', in Siegel, K. (ed.) pp.55-72.

¹⁵ Melman, B. (1992) *Women's Orient: English Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918* (Basingstoke: Macmillan), pp.235-239.

and I don't know what beside. She dashes down sketches with her pen and ink, making arrow-heads to indicate the bark of Jackals!¹⁶

Evans' letter to Hennell implies that she regarded Bodichon as a reliable source of knowledge about this 'exotic' country of unimaginable curiosities ('and I don't know what beside'). Evans seems to be paraphrasing Bodichon's own words, explaining to her friend what Bodichon says in her letter ('She dashes down sketches with her pen and ink, making arrow-heads to indicate the bark of Jackals!'). By transmitting 'literally' Bodichon's words Evans contributes to circulating two images: the image of Algeria as a 'glorious scenery and strange picturesque life' full of 'palms and Arabs and wild horses and lions and panthers' that is in fact closer than one would expect ('It really seems an easy way of bringing the tropics near to one's imagination, to take that short journey'); and the self-image Bodichon projected in her letter: a venturesome young woman who discovers an 'exotic' land. In methodological terms, this *letter about* Bodichon permits pointing out how Bodichon's self-image that resulted out of the process of *Bildung* was received and circulated by other people.

During her adventurous trips, in her travel letters to her sisters (Bella and Nanny), and confidantes Bodichon explained anecdotes and intimate secrets. In 1850 Bodichon and Parkes, aged 23 and 21 respectively, embarked on an unchaperoned trip in Continental Europe. They travelled through Belgium, Austria, Germany and Switzerland. The two friends travelled with books and painting material in view of putting words and images to their impressions. In her letters to her sisters, Bodichon gave written voice to the exhilarating experience of freely travelling from country to country with her best friend. They dressed comfortably in loose-fitting short skirts above the ankle and were equipped with thick-soled boots and blue-tinted spectacles. Their outfits did not go unnoticed. The two travel fellows confided to Nanny and Bella their unsuccessful encounters with young Germans in a self-mocking tone – full of pride in their independence of spirit. The latter were half appalled half amused by their outfits. In Heidelberg Parkes met a young German up in a castle. As she explained to Bella and Nanny:

[I'm] sending [a] little episode you have not yet been told. Before reaching Heidelberg we fell in with Mr [and] Miss Turner, young Londoners; he a Lawyer, a slight elegant creature with a straight

¹⁶ Evans to Sara Hennell, 16 April [1857], Haight, G.S. (ed.) (1985) *Selections from George Eliot Letters* (New Haven: Yale University Press) p.169.

intellectual brow & fascinating manner. I travelled with them in the railway alone – Ah! – at Heidelberg He & She were there; we went up the Castle to see a glorious sunset; & - He was there. – It was damp; & I (who always you know my dear always look to [unreadable] reason & not to female adornment) had put on my – Big Boots – Up & down went we, by the beautiful red [unreadable], tree grown & hill [unreadable]; His heart warmed; I know it did; & I – shall I confess it, - mine – was – not cool. We talked of romantic old times, (such a towering subject, suggestive of knights, lady lovers etc) Suddenly, with an air of the tenderest interest he turned; - &, a fine smile lighting up his beautiful eyes, he said “I fear you will be wet” I – oh that I live to second it; I – insensate ass, goose, fool; in my simplicity; my innocence of all arts of coquetry, delicately turned up my sole from under my long sole & showed it him. I showed him my sole, but not my soul; for oh, a sarcastic smile lit up his face with a cold metallic glitter, & he said “I think you are better provided than I am”. And those were the last words I hear from his dear lips. Oh Boots, Boots, Boots, Now shall I henceforth bear the sight of you. The Boots I put on for my defence have trimmed out my destruction. Boots (it shall be recorded) were my death...

Pardon me, gallant captain of the Steamer Concordia; that I – having been a whole day under your polite care, have omitted to record your height, your manly bearing; your blue & gist uniform; the anchor on your coat collar; your delicate French, & above all, your [unreadable] moustache – In fact, 98 young ladies out of a 100 would have been won by him; but Bar & I were glorious exceptions – If you had been there to see the way in which he took off his hat to me as I quitted the vessel – And if you had but seen the 2 Germans whom we drew, & who soon found out what we were about, & immediately smiled double with concerted – The handsome red fleshly Ruben’s man, the big [?] vulgar smoking man; & the little sharp nosed man who would not be looked at. B[arbara] drew them, spectacles on nose, & buried in her frightful blue shade, & looked so queer that I think he was frightened at her.¹⁷

According to Parkes’ narrative, Bodichon’s clothing, appearance, and attitude caused fearful astonishment. In reply to these ‘accusations’ Bodichon wrote to her sisters:

Don’t believe a word Bessie says. She tells most dreadful stories. If I have my spectacles, she has her boots, which make sentimental Germans laugh, and with which she vows to stump out every bit of love from every heart which warms to her. When she has made friends with a fine moustachio’d German, on she draws the enchanted boots (and vice versa to a certain waist band) and stumps about bitterly thinking of an Englishman. And stump, stump, she

¹⁷ Parkes to [Bella and Nanny Leigh Smith], [1850], GCPP Parkes 6/65.

vows to go down to an early grave, and after that to out stump in ghostly boots.¹⁸

We do not have the letter that Nanny and Bella Leigh Smith may have written in return. But knowing that letter-writers constantly updated their address so that they could receive letters from family and friends wherever they were (see chapter 4), Bodichon's sisters may well have replied to Parkes' and Bodichon's letters. These two letters suggest a triangle of dialogues that attest to Bodichon's and Parkes' feminist self-fashioning as triggered by travelling.

In starting her narrative with the words '[I'm] sending [a] little episode you have not yet been told', Parkes is claiming the exclusivity of her story, only explained to a select group of people – here, trustworthy confidantes. Inversely, Parkes (and Bodichon) are for the Leigh Smith sisters a privileged source of information about anecdotes – episodes of her travel that Bodichon may not have explained to her father or her aunt Julia for example. The narratives are full of drama ('He was there', 'Suddenly', 'my death'). And this raises the expectations of the intended readers. In their narratives, both Bodichon and Parkes project themselves as bold young female travellers: Parkes takes the train 'alone', Bodichon draws the people in the vessel, 'spectacles on nose, & buried in her frightful blue shade', looking 'so queer' that she frightens men.

In their letters the two friends portray themselves confidently as independent women by making fun of the male characters in their stories. Drawing on chivalrous notions of love, Parkes claims her right to enjoy romance ('We talked of romantic old times, (such a towering subject, suggestive of knights, lady lovers etc)') and her right to love and be loved ('His heart warmed; I know it did; & I – shall I confess it, - mine – was – not cool'). In a gesture of self-confidence, she does so by authorising herself in a self-mocking tone. This self-mocking attitude has the effect of undermining the apparent admiration and respect she feels for the young German. For, in the end, she does not seem to take seriously either her clumsiness ('[I] delicately turned up my sole from under my long sole & showed it him. I showed him my sole, but not my soul') or the young man's interest in her ('with an air of the tenderest interest he turned') and his sarcasm ('"I fear you will be wet"', '"I think you are better provided than I

¹⁸ Bodichon to [Bella and Nanny Leigh Smith], [1850], Burton, H. (1949) *Barbara Bodichon, 1827-1891* (London: J. Murray) p.34.

am’’). By calling herself ‘insensate ass, goose, fool’ and by deploring her ‘simplicity; my innocence of all arts of coquetry’ in fact she is projecting herself as a young woman sure of herself. This re-fashioned woman is proud of her pragmatism when she gives priority to comfort (to wear boots in a damp day) over ‘female adornment’. Judging by the tone of her epistolary voice, in the end she does not seem to mind her ‘defence’ having trimmed out her ‘destruction’. Likewise, in using irony to describe a ‘gallant captain’ who offers her ‘polite care’, has ‘manly bearing’ and a ‘moustache’, dresses in a ‘blue & gist uniform’, and speaks in a ‘delicate French’, Parkes sounds very pleased to be, together with Bodichon, among the ‘glorious’ 2% of women who are not ‘won by him’.

Bodichon too mocks the men in the story. She does so as depicted by Parkes. According to Parkes (narrative relationality), Bodichon adopts a defying attitude in front of the men in the vessel. In turn, like Parkes, in her own narrative Bodichon does not take men seriously either. For she refers dismissively to Parkes’ friend as a ‘sentimental German’. All in all, Bodichon’s and Parkes’ narratives project a self-image that challenges gender expectations in the context of female travelling. In negotiating their persona as female travellers, their narratives stand for a modified notion of ‘female travelling’; one that instils fear in the men they encounter along the way (and at which they seem delighted). In fact, these men may have felt, not fear, but ‘repugnance’ and may have disapproved of the two young women travelling unchaperoned and enjoying their time on their own. If this was indeed the case, Bodichon and Parkes do not seem to have taken it seriously. For in their narratives they reinterpreted these eventual objections as ‘fear’; that is, they may have made an empowering reinterpretation that neutralised (presumed) distaste and turned it into an example of women’s capacity to challenge men. Travelling – exposure to the unknown – strengthened Bodichon’s *and* Parkes’ self-conception as independent women (as noted, Parkes also projects an articulation of her *Bildung* in letters). The outcome of the process of self-alienation – encountering fellow citizens, ‘romantic places, ‘love’, ‘fear’ or ‘disapproval’ – is a reaffirmation of their self-belief.

During her continental tour in 1850, the letters Bodichon sent to her family display a nuanced portrait of Bodichon as a female traveller. As outlined in chapter 1, Bodichon was born into a politically and philanthropically engaged family. Following the Leigh Smiths’ tradition, in her letters she presented herself to her family as a politically aware and committed citizen, embracing the advance

of justice and democracy. Thus, while she made fun of Parkes' unsuccessful love affairs with a young man in her letter to her sisters, Bodichon expressed her views dramatically about the political situation in Austria to her paternal aunt, Julia Smith. With no sense of subtlety, Bodichon expressed her profound distrust of the Habsburgs. Bodichon, who participated in the political salons her father organized in his London and Hastings homes from an early age, where she discussed the dominant debates of the time with leading figures, wrote to her in a rather dramatic tone:

I did not know before, how intense, how completely a part of my soul were all feelings about freedom and justice in politics and government. I did not think, when I was so glad to go in Austria, how the sight of people ruled by the sword in place of law, would stir up my heart, and make me feel as miserable as those who live under it.¹⁹

Like the politically-aware self-projection discussed in the previous chapter, Bodichon seems to have been imbued with her family's and especially her father's insights about politics. In chapter 5 I suggested that, in her letters sent to Parkes and Buchanan commenting on the 1848 revolutions, Bodichon did not seem to have undergone *Bildung's* critical mimesis but to have 'passively' absorbed her family's beliefs. This narrative attests to a different attitude. Here she gains self-awareness as a result of travelling. In the above narrative Bodichon undertakes critical mimesis by revising and assessing previous beliefs – her 'feelings about freedom and justice in politics and government'. She already had these feelings (informed by her family's political commitments). But first-hand experience of Austrian life awakens in her a renewed self-understanding – one that considers the principles of freedom and justice as 'intense' and 'completely' parts of her soul and one that makes her feel solidarity with 'those who live under it [sword]'. This narrative stands for an example of Bodichon's epistolary refashioning of her identity as a traveller: an exposure to difference that revises and reinforces her self-conception as a politically committed young woman. It is a nuanced articulation of self-alienation by virtue of the recipient to which it is addressed.

During her European trip Bodichon and Parkes stopped at Munich to pay a visit to Anna Mary Howitt, who moved there with fellow artist Jane Benham to

¹⁹ Bodichon to Julia Smith, [Austria, 1850], Burton, H. (1949) p.33.

train with Kaulbach.²⁰ Reinforcing the politically engaged self-image that Bodichon, now back in England, projected, Howitt wrote to her from Germany:

I love to think of you returned to your own dear old self after all the strange beautiful and painful experiences you have gleaned on your journey. My darling! How unhappy you must have been! Yet unhappy with an unhappiness it is right to feel! – Would to God that it lay in the power of those who sympathize so truly and deeply as you do with these poor, poor oppressed people – to aid them! But surely a better day will come there must be justice still alive in the earth! ... Yet I cannot regret that you should so deeply have felt the misery around you it will spur you on to do much good in the world! – Oh! I am so confident of the good that will be accomplished thro' your means dearest Barbara! And your beloved painting with its soothing invigorating influence, is it not beautiful to see it coming to your aid like a calm angel-²¹

In her letter, Howitt seems to sympathise with Bodichon's 'strange beautiful and painful experiences' that made her 'unhappy' during her stay in Austria. In her expression of sympathy, Howitt assumes that Bodichon has come back to England unchanged ('returned to your own dear old self'). At the same time, she seems to acknowledge that this 'unhappy' experience will propel her towards gestures of solidarity ('misery around you it will spur you on to do much good in the world!'). As outlined above, my suggestion is that Bodichon's 'unhappy' and 'painful experiences' – her exposure to 'the sight of people ruled by the sword' – is a transformative experience that reaffirms Bodichon's political commitment. As suggested in chapter 5, cause-effect is difficult to derive through epistolary narratives but it could be argued that, as in the case of engaging readings, Bodichon's outlook and choices were informed by this kind of self-alienation as effected by travelling.

Howitt's narrative is illustrative of the type of feedback that nurtured Bodichon's epistolary self-projections. As Humboldt highlights:

man stands before us not so much as a single isolated creature but more like an offshoot from a large whole, his entire existence closely bound up with that whole. His feelings demand response, his insight affirmation by others; self-confidence in his capacities needs inspiring

²⁰ Hirsch, P. (1998) *Barbara Bodichon: Feminist, Artist and Rebel* (London: Chatto and Windus) p.44.

²¹ Howitt to Bodichon, 57 Amalien Strasse, Munich, [25 october 1850], Columbia University, Butler Library, Leonore Beaky, Letters of Howitt to Bodichon, letter 13.

example. His whole inner being calls for consciousness of a corresponding being outside him.²²

Echoing Humboldt's understanding of man as a relational being, Howitt's letter stands for the 'response' and 'affirmation' that fuelled Bodichon's development. Thus, evoking God's help, Howitt promotes her friend's artistic and reformist endeavours and expresses her faith in her capacity to accomplish them. Bodichon presented herself as a politically engaged citizen and, as will be discussed, as an artist. In turn, by addressing Bodichon as such, Howitt reinforced the self-image her friend circulated. Reminiscent of the methodological significance of 'letters to' and 'letters about', Howitt's narrative evokes Marian Evans' letter about Bodichon's Algerian trip (sent to Sarah Hennell) in that they both circulated and thus contributed to establish Bodichon's projected self-image.

In this case, Howitt's feedback is positive in that she confirms Bodichon's self-presentation and encourages her artistic and reformist ventures. Feedback could also be of a more negative kind, as Howitt suffered herself. Six years later, in 1856, she painted *Boadicea* – a historical scene in oil – but was rejected by the Royal Academy. Art critic John Ruskin sent her a letter of disapprobation where he put into question both her right to paint a historical scene and her capacity to do so. It seems that Ruskin's words were decisive: she abandoned her career as an artist.²³ Bodichon once requested Ruskin to review her American sketches. He duly sent her a letter but he sounded more interested in criticizing her feminist activities than in offering aesthetic judgement. In a rather condescending tone he wrote:

Dear Mme Bodichon

It has become impossible for me lately to answer above half the letters which I wish to answer, and of those, not above again a half in the time I should like to answer, and yet more impossible for me to look at drawings, unless sometimes one or two done by my pupils, and you know, you are not a pupil of mine, or you would never draw American Swamps, when I have been telling you all, as hard as I could tell you, for years back, the things that really want drawing in our Europe. Do you really seriously think that a drawing of an American swamp is a precious thing to bequeath to posterity? I don't like your ladies reading room either, at all, but I am always faithfully yours,

²² Humboldt, W. von (1823) 'To What Extent May one Judge the Cultural Level of the American Natives from their Linguistic Remains?', p.29, in Cowan, M. (ed.) (1963) p.70.

²³ Cherry, D. (1993) *Painting Women: Victorian Women Artists* (London and New York: Routledge) pp.187-188.

J. Ruskin²⁴

It seems Bodichon was less daunted by Ruskin's disapproval than Howitt. But, like positive feedback, she must have had to adjust the criticism of a leading art critic to her confident artistic self-belief. In an attempt to neutralize Ruskin's censure, Marian Evans wrote a letter to Bodichon where she gave to understand that because of his prejudices against women it was not worth taking his views seriously. In a sarcastic tone that evokes a direct challenge to male authority, she wrote:

My dear Barbara
I think Ruskin has not been encouraged about women by his many and persistent efforts to teach them. He seems to have found them wanting in real scientific interest – bent on sentimentalizing in everything.²⁵

Bodichon also projected versatile articulations of her self-alienation during her American trip. Bodichon and her husband married in London on 2 July 1857. At the end of the summer the couple set off on a ten-month honeymoon across America and Canada. In her letters to the Leigh Smiths, Bodichon wrote long passages giving her opinion about American society while she reassured her maternal aunt (Dorothy Longden) about her marital happiness. In her letters to Longden Bodichon made sense of her new marital status and informed of her blissfulness. She gave accounts of their household arrangements and daily routine. Bodichon assured her aunt Dorothy:

If you were here I would give you a very curious birthday dinner: queer fish, gumbo soup, roast grey squirrel, boiled wildcat, omelette of alligators' eggs, seven fried bananas and cocoanuts – they are so cheap, five or six bananas for 2 ½d. And a delicious cocoanut for 2 ½d. We have two date palms in our garden, but I do not fancy they bear fruit here. ... Aunty dear: you need not be afraid of the Doctor not taking care of me. He takes the same sort of care of me that Miss Hays²⁶ used to do at Roughwood, and you said I should not find a husband who would do so. He is something like her in his ways – not so elegant, but more.²⁷

²⁴ John Ruskin to Bodichon, 14 Oct, GCPP Bodichon 7/6.

²⁵ Evans to Bodichon, Carclew, Hesketh Road, Torquay, [28 March 1868], Haight, G.S. (ed.) (1985) p.343.

²⁶ Hays was co-editor of *The English Woman's Journal*.

²⁷ Bodichon to Jo Gratton, New Orleans, 21 December [1857], Reed, J.W. (ed.) (1972) *An American Diary 1857-1858* (London: Routledge and K. Paul) p.67.

As she did during their voyage to Brittany to visit Dr Bodichon's relatives four years later,²⁸ in this letter Bodichon projected a positive image of her husband. In other excerpts of her American letters she conveyed his 'kindest regards to everyone'²⁹ and encouraged them to write him 'a scrap' back, which he would 'always answer'.³⁰ Throughout her married life, Bodichon used letters to smooth out the tense relationship between her husband and her family, who never fully approved of him. We know about this through the letters Nanny Smith wrote to her lifelong companion Isabella Blythe and vice versa.³¹ These extant letters date from the 1870s onwards but they make reference to family disapproval from an earlier date. Only to Evans, who had a cordial relation with her husband, did Bodichon confide her marital difficulties. To Evans she confessed just two years after the wedding: 'When I see you I must have some serious talk with you about him [Dr Bodichon] I think you are the most likely person in the world to help me'.³²

In the above letter addressed to Longden, Bodichon makes sense of her new married life, conveys an image of marital happiness, and reassures her aunt; and she does so by turning gender roles upside down. Indeed, Bodichon's narrative attests to her capacity to directly challenge gender normativity. In her portrait of her married life, she positions herself at the centre of her couple and claims her right to benefit from the kind of household chores that traditionally a wife would take – a question I will discuss again in the following chapter. Thus, in her letter Bodichon negotiates her household arrangements in the context of travelling self-alienation. Drawing on a revised understanding of wifedom and on narratives of exoticism, she claims her voice within her marriage in a land of 'curious', 'queer', and delicious food. In this case, Bodichon seems to be putting into practice the feminist self-conception she had been developing up to now (a feminist conscience that, I suggest, was at least partially triggered by her 'peculiar education', including her engaging readings, stimulating educational activities and epistolary conversations).

²⁸ Travel diary written to her Leigh Smith family as letters, Brittany, 3-27 June 1861, GCPP Bodichon 8/4.

²⁹ Bodichon to Benjamin Smith and Nanny Leigh Smith, Savannah River, 13 March [1858], Reed, J.W. (ed.) (1972) p.127.

³⁰ Bodichon to Benjamin Smith, [Savannah], 3-4 March [1858], Ibid, p.123.

³¹ GCPP Bodichon 11/14 and GCP Bodichon 11/26.

³² Bodichon to Evans, [Algeria], 25 December [1859], Yale University, Beinecke Library, George Eliot and George Lewes Collection, Box 7.

Simultaneous to her making sense of her married life, in America Bodichon also redefined her political outlook. Exposed to difference, in her letters to the Leigh Smiths she revised her views on the nature and degree of freedom secured in England, which, as pointed out, previously had seemed to her a referent vis-à-vis the Habsburg's 'rule of sword' in Austria. To her father, Aunt Julia and siblings she wrote:

This is really a free country in the respect of having no privileged class – excepting the class of white over black. White men are free in America and no mistake! My wonder is great at the marvellous manner in which the country governs itself. I find myself saying continually, 'this is a free country'. One is so little used to freedom, real freedom, even in England that it takes time to understand freedom, to realize it. Nothing sent from upper powers to be worshipped or humbly listened to, no parsons sent by a class of born rulers to preach and lecture to another class born to submit and pay. No race of men with honours they have not earned and power over others which the others have not consented them. Heavens what a difference! Here all who hold power are heaved up by the people, of the people. Until I came to America I hardly felt the strange want of rational liberty in England.³³

Like her letter to Longden, this epistolary narrative is testimony to Bodichon's process of self-alienation as effected by travelling – how she extended towards the unknown ('real freedom') and incorporated it into her sense of self in the form of a redefined political outlook. Resonating with *Bildung's* self-alienation effected by exposure to difference, Siegel highlights that 'For many women, comparisons of home and abroad provided a subtle method of critiquing their own culture.'³⁴ Like them, Bodichon's first-hand experience in America leads her to revise her understanding about her own country. Before her American trip, England epitomised political freedom and justice. It is this reference against which she compared the 'rule of sword' in Austria during her European trip six years before. However, her exposure to a different society and a different political organization ('the marvellous manner in which the country governs itself') urges her to question this reference. After her trip, it seems to her that there is no 'real freedom' in England compared to America. The desirable democratic British parliamentary monarchy that Bodichon wished to be exported to other European

³³ Bodichon's diary-letters to her family, [New Orleans], 27 December [1857], Reed, J.W. (ed.) (1972) p.72.

³⁴ Siegel, K. (2004) p.5.

countries that were still ruled by despotism becomes a deficient system as a result of her encounter with difference, i.e. 'real freedom'. And Bodichon finds it difficult to accommodate this upheaval: 'One is so little used to freedom ... that it takes time to understand freedom, to realize it'. At the same time, undergoing an in-depth process of critical mimesis, while criticising England for its lack of 'real freedom', she also puts into question this 'real freedom' in America by highlighting the privileges of the 'white over black' – a question I will discuss in more detail in the following section.

Informed by what she experiences in America, Bodichon seems to go as far as to question class hierarchies back in England when she describes in praising terms American society and government: 'Nothing sent from upper powers ... others have not consented them'. She had never considered putting into question her English reference prior to her experience of this 'free country': 'Until I came to America I hardly felt the strange want of rational liberty in England'. This self-criticism can be interpreted as implying a criticism of the political beliefs defended by her family (which informed her outlook, as previously discussed). Although not explicitly articulated, putting into question the roots of her own outlook would imply a thorough critical engagement that contrasts to the 'passive' mimesis I outlined in the previous chapter. Yet, her new apparently 'classless' viewpoint stands in contrast to the bourgeois standpoint from which she speaks in her other epistolary narratives – for example in the letter about Elizabeth Siddall addressed to Parkes discussed in chapter 2. Commenting on Deborah Cherry's work, I highlighted Bodichon's problematic bourgeois standpoint in the letter she wrote to Parkes referring to Siddall's health. Bodichon's interest in the health of Siddall may have been 'spontaneous and whole-hearted', as Sheila Herstein states.³⁵ But, as Cherry suggests, Bodichon's treatment of Siddall was not exactly that of an equal but that of a 'non-lady'. As I will further discuss in the following section and in chapter 7, my suggestion is that this ambiguous position vis-à-vis class hierarchies attests to Bodichon's partial self-alienation. Ultimately, by drawing on the narrative of America as a 'really' free country and by implicitly questioning the discourse of the democratic nature of the English political system, in her letter Bodichon projects herself as a woman with a right to express her own voice on a

³⁵ Herstein, S. (1985) *A Mid-Victorian Feminist, Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press) p.100.

‘masculine’ topic – politics and state systems. And she does so in a confident voice as an insider – for she has experienced the difference between ‘freedom’ and ‘real freedom’ – that directly challenges dominant beliefs in blissful female ignorance and ladylike modesty – a question I will discuss in detail in the following section.

Bodichon regarded herself as an accomplished watercolour painter and, in her travel letters, she invariably projected herself as a professional artist. During her honeymoon trip, she made constant references to her painting sessions, both indoors and *en plein air* on her own while her husband went for long walks by himself. She did not miss the opportunity to update her correspondents about her artistic achievements. The American Exhibition of British Art had been touring around the country in 1857-1858 and was displayed in Boston while Bodichon was staying in town with her husband. She visited the exhibition and was overjoyed when she ‘saw SOLD on two of my pictures!’³⁶ In her narrative Bodichon used the type of ambiguous tone she and Parkes displayed in her letters to Nanny and Bella Leigh Smith during their European tour. Her self-derision reveals her delight at her works attracting attention and at her being treated as a known professional artist. To her family she told an anecdote that occurred at the exhibition:

A gentleman who had heard of Barbara Smith as an artist went to see her pictures, not knowing I was married, did not understand the (Bodichon) which they had put, as well as BLSB [Barbara Leigh Smith]. “Oh,” said a friend, “It’s the name of a style like P.R.B. [Pre-Raphaelite Brethren], you know, etc” “Oh, yes! Ah!” So the gentleman goes to the clerk, and he wanting to be thought wise says, “Oh, yes sir!” So the gentleman goes about saying, “Barbara L. Smith is a fine artist, in the Bodichon style you know”. Miss Clarke hears of it and is in fits of laughter at the Bodichonite’.³⁷

By expressing her joy at being recognised beyond her audience in England Bodichon re-fashioned her self-understanding as a professional artist. Finding out she was known in America could well have enhanced her self-assurance. It is through confident artistic self-projections such as this that Bodichon contributed to redefining the category of woman artist and challenging men’s exclusive claims to professionalism.

In the eyes of Victorian society, Bodichon’s outlook verged upon eccentricity and was occasionally condemned. However, she seems to have taken

³⁶ Bodichon’s diary-letters to her family, [Boston], 2 June [1858], Reed, J.W. (ed.) (1972) p.154.

³⁷ Bodichon’s diary-letters to her family, [Boston], 3 June [1858], Ibid, p.155.

certain delight at this. Unapologetic for compromising her femininity, during her outdoor painting sessions she wore comfortable clothes, appropriate boots, a big hat and a pair of blue glasses. By doing so, she contributed to redefining femininity as 'active, strong, working and self-determined'.³⁸ As during her European tour, her attire did not go unnoticed in America. She once frightened off a group of black children, who, scared by her appearance, ran away as she approached. She wrote to her family:

Went to draw at Carrollton [New Orleans] with my big drawing hat, etc. Six negro children who were playing stopped, stared and then began to run away, frightened by my appearance. 'I do not eat niggers,' I said – so they came up to me and one said, 'Why, it's a woman!' 'Why do you wear boots?' 'Because it is wet!' 'Why do you wear spectacles?' 'Because I can't see without' 'Why do you wear a hat?' 'Because I can't carry a parasol!'. So we became good friends. They were jolly children, half naked. One was a real little Topsy who sang and danced, and then seized the youngest and screamed to me, 'I'll sell you this child for two dollars'. The poor little thing howled and cried and I gave Topsy a scolding for such a wicked joke.³⁹

This letter excerpt stands for Bodichon's epistolary negotiation of her persona as a woman traveller. Reminiscent of the attitude she adopted during her European tour six years earlier, Bodichon defied conventions with no sign of false modesty. On the contrary, her self-projection evokes self-reliance and self-esteem – attitudes that in the female nature were deemed unnatural if not offensive. Indeed, southern women found Bodichon's outfits embarrassing. Her outdoor painting attire, especially her leather boots, were considered horrendous and her wardrobe *démodé*. The southern women offered her embellishments but Bodichon declined, privately dismissing their indulgences. She wrote irritated to her family:

I am astonished more and more at the stupid extravagance of the women. Mrs. H. (who gains her living by keeping a boarding house) has spent, she says, at least £60 on hair dyes in the last ten years. All the ladies, even little girls, wear white powder on their faces and many rouge. All wear silk dresses in the street and my carmelite and grey linen dresses are so singular here that many ladies would refuse to walk with me. ... Leather boots for ladies are considered monstrous. I never saw such utter astonishment as is depicted on the

³⁸ Cherry, D. (1993) p.170.

³⁹ Bodichon's diary-letters to her family, [New Orleans], 5 January [1858], Reed, J.W. (ed.) (1972) pp.77-78. As noted in chapter 4, some of Bodichon's American letters were written in diary format addressed collectively to her family.

faces of the populace when I return from a sketching excursion. ... The people in the house would lend me any amount of flower garden bonnets if i would but go out in them. ... My little plain bonnet and plain ribbon is despised, all my wardrobe considered shabby and triste.⁴⁰

Bodichon's option to give priority to comfort over fashion echoes Parkes' despising of 'female ornaments' during her visit to Heidelberg. Bodichon's tone in this narrative is less cheerful than hers and Parkes' in their letters from Germany. Here Bodichon sounds more bothered. But her astonishment at southern women's 'stupid extravagance' and her annoyance over their 'astonishment' and disapproval did not dissuade her from her dressing habits. Unlike the question of freedom in America and Britain, Bodichon's uncompromising attitude on dress evokes a process of self-alienation that confirms rather than questions her beliefs prior to discovering difference. The outcome of this self-alienation is a direct challenge to bourgeois femininity as projected in sanctioned modes of dressing, comportment, painting, and travelling.

As these examples illustrate, in her letters Bodichon projected versatile articulations of her self-alienation as effected by travelling. In the process, she critically engaged with beliefs and customs, including gender normativity. In this sense, these epistolary narratives reflect a positive outcome of her encounter with difference: a critical individuated self that, having incorporated the unknown into her sense of being, challenged female fashion and behaviour, sanctioned modes of female travelling, and prescriptive norms of female painting. At some points this 'positive' self-alienation took place at the expense of certain social categories, as I discuss in more detail in the following section and in chapter 7.

6.3 A Traveller Expert in Art and Social Reform

Against the types of sanctioned modes of female travelling described by Siegel, Jenkins and Banerjee (see beginning of section 6.2.), in her letters, Bodichon presented herself assertively as an experienced traveller. In autumn 1866 Bodichon embarked on her regular voyage to Algeria. She used to invite

⁴⁰ Bodichon's diary-letters to her family, [New Orleans], 21 January [1858], Reed, J.W. (ed.) (1972) p.87.

female friends such as Parkes, botanist Marianne North and garden designer Gertrude Jekyll. On this occasion she was accompanied by her friend Matilda Betham Edwards – a Sussex-born author of short novels. Instead of crossing France and sailing from Marseille, the two friends travelled across France and Spain. In the series of letters she wrote to Marian Evans, Bodichon described her journey as an English visitor giving practical advice on travelling, accommodation, and shopping as well as offering personal opinions on local culture and customs. In Spain Bodichon recommended visiting the cathedrals at Burgos and Toledo, the convents of Las Huelgas and Miraflores, the Prado Museum in Madrid, the mosque at Cordoba, and the Alhambra in Granada. She was impressed by the ‘richness & picturesqueness’ of these sites and provided long detailed descriptions of their beauty. But she deplored the poor state of the buildings. Referring to the cathedral in Toledo she commented:

Here the feeling of every thing going to ruin is quite terrible it really saddens me. It seems, if you would see anything you must come at once. "This tower fell down last winter" said Cabezas [their guide] showing us a mass of Moorish ruin in the ditch & again in the Moorish houses he showed us ceilings half destroyed & told us a few years ago you could see all the colours & gilding. So come at once & if it is not very cold you will never be so happy any where as in the Cathedral which is perfect.⁴¹

By recommending these monuments, Bodichon was referring to locations ‘already well known from guidebooks, tourist itineraries, antecedent imagery, colonial histories or archaeological reports’, which demonstrates to what extent her recommendations were culturally determined.⁴² Yet this choice also permitted her to redefine the category of female traveller. By assessing the cultural worth of these sights making use of her authorial power as a regular traveller and resident in Algeria, she claimed women as legitimate sources of expertise.

Regarding herself an accomplished professional artist, in her letters Bodichon circulated a private (and public, for she published a series of articles on travelling) self-image as knowledgeable in art. She used the genre of travel writing as a way of empowering herself as a referent. In doing so, she was placing herself within an already established tradition. For, as Betty Hagglund shows in her study

⁴¹ Bodichon to Evans, France and Spain, [November - 16 December] 1866, Beinecke, Box 7.

⁴² Cherry, D. (2000) *Beyond the Frame: Feminism and Visual Culture, Britain 1850-1900* (London and New York: Routledge) p.88.

of female travel writing about Scotland, British women had been using the written medium to assert their authority as experts since at least the late eighteenth century.⁴³ Notwithstanding, adopting a position of authority and being credited for it was not a straightforward endeavour. As Sara Mills points out, female travel writers were often belittled or disbelieved. They structured their texts 'in the light of potential accusations of exaggeration and falsehood' and 'had to deal with accusations of lying after publication'.⁴⁴ Similarly, Pamela Gerrish Nunn explains that nineteenth-century female art critics encountered difficulties in having their works taken seriously. Associated with amateur practice, women were allowed to express their views on the principles of art and the study of beauty in diaries and private correspondence but not to make a living out of it.⁴⁵ An inspirational exception was Irish miniature painter Anna Jameson. Separated from her husband four years after their marriage, Jameson earned a living from her writing as an art critic and from her miniature and enamel artwork.⁴⁶ She became a much-respected authority in literary criticism, biography and, most notably, art history.⁴⁷ An inveterate traveller and an acute social observer, she gained 'a cultural position which gave her the authority to speak out and be listened to'. As Norma Clarke points out, 'Very few women managed to achieve such a position'.⁴⁸ As Parkes' poem to Bodichon corroborates (see chapter 5), Jameson became an inspirational figure for many like-minded mid-Victorian women.⁴⁹ For, as Clarke claims, as 'An established professional writer with an international reputation, a woman of wisdom and wit, independent, much-travelled, hard-working, gritty and experienced', Jameson represented a role model of a respectable middle-class woman earning her own bread.⁵⁰

As a professional painter and thus acknowledgeable in aesthetics, Bodichon, like Jameson, entered into the male bastion of aesthetic judgement. In

⁴³ Hagglund, B. (2009) *Tourists and Travellers Women's Non-Fictional Writing about Scotland, 1770-1830* (Bristol and Buffalo: Channel View).

⁴⁴ Mills, S. (1991) *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (London: Routledge) p.125.

⁴⁵ Nunn, P.G. (1995) 'Critically Speaking', in Orr, C.C. (ed.) *Women in the Victorian Art World* (Manchester: Manchester University Press) pp.107-124.

⁴⁶ Johnston, J. (1997) *Anna Jameson: Victorian, Feminist, Woman of Letters* (Aldershot: Scolar) p.2.

⁴⁷ Clarke, N. (2000) 'Anna Jameson: "The idol of Thousands of Young ladies"', in Hilton, M. and Hirsch, P. (eds) *Practical Visionaries: Women, Education and Social Process, 1790-1930* (New York: Longman) p.70.

⁴⁸ Clarke, N. (2000) p.72. Harriet Martineau may be regarded as another successful example.

⁴⁹ Strachey, R. (1928, reprinted 1978) *The Cause: A Short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britain* (London: Virago) p.89, quoted in Clarke, N. (2000) p.69; Hirsch, P. (1998) pp.23-24.

⁵⁰ Clarke, N. (2000) pp.69-70.

her travel letters Bodichon displayed an emotional response to the beauty of the landscapes she encountered, projecting a relational interaction with them as invigorating places. For instance, during a convalescent trip to Italy in 1854-1855 Bodichon took daily rides on horseback around the Roman Campagna. Writing to her aunt Dorothy Longden she commented: 'My most vivid ideas for pictures are horseback views, wild and dashy'.⁵¹ In this sense, she adopted a traditional understanding of femininity. For this relational sensibility was culturally associated with female nature.⁵² At the same time, Bodichon adopted the 'masculine' – and thus authoritative – subject position of describing and judging the aesthetic value of cultural sites from an omniscient and commanding standpoint.⁵³ As Corinne Fowler points out, exilic displacement 'from the familiar' implies transcending 'cultural formations' and the 'apparent possession of insider knowledge commonly acts as an authorizing strategy' in asserting one's expertise.⁵⁴ Reflecting this self-alienation in her encounter with the Other, Bodichon projected herself as an authority in Arab culture and art by virtue of her expertise as an insider, i.e. as a resident in Algeria and frequent traveller. For instance, in Granada Bodichon recommended wandering about the streets of Cordoba and diving 'into the open shops, which are all arranged like Arab shops so that you can study all the manufactures of the place'. Writing in a commanding tone, she highlighted the remarkable 'likeness to Algiers' as for the 'forms, colours & trades'. Her detailed and precise narrative is evocative of the kind of accurate and careful descriptions written by a specialist:

For example the Arabs have a rough simple way of turning wood, holding a bow (like a violin bow) in the right hand which turns the wood round while the left hand presses the chisel & the toes of the foot are used to direct it. Here in Cordoba I saw 4 or 5 Spaniards sitting on low seats turning exactly like Arabs – in another shop I saw weaving in rough handlooms exactly like Arab looms & the patterns were Arab patters, they were weaving camels for the mules.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Bodichon to Dorothy Longden, [Rome, winter 1854-1855], Burton, H. (1949) p.75.

⁵² Foster, S. and Mills, S. (eds) (2002) *An Anthology of Women's Travel Writing* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press) p.91.

⁵³ Foster, S. and Mills, S. (eds) (2002) p.105.

⁵⁴ Fowler, C. (2004) 'The Problem of Narrative Authority: Catherine Oddie and Kate Karko', in Siegel, K. (ed.) p.214, quoting Kaplan, C. (1996) *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (London: Duke University Press) p.81; Fowler, C. (2004) p.220.

⁵⁵ Bodichon to Evans, France and Spain, [November - 16 December] 1866, Beinecke, Box 7.

In Granada too, Bodichon was 'very much disappointed not to see any beautiful tiles'. Writing in an unhesitating tone she considered that:

The Spanish raised tile is not to be compared with the old tiles of Algiers it must be very much more modern & is often ugly in colour. Of course, the mosaic pottery in the Alhambra is beautiful & the few little tiles one sees with the shield & the motto are good but for exquisite design you must go to the Hidora Palace [?] Algiers & study these 49 different patterns.⁵⁶

Likewise, having visited the cathedral and the monasteries of Las Huelgas and La Cartuja de Miraflores in Burgos, Bodichon wrote:

We saw Burgos very well but it is worth a month's study. Nothing can exceed the richness & picturesqueness of the cathedral. ... The next day I wandered about with Streets Gothic Architecture in Spain & saw everything he writes about. Two remarks I have to make he says there is no influence of the moors in the buildings. Here I think this is not true. The wooden doors of the Convent of Las Huelgas & of the Cathedral are of the exact panelling of the oldest doors in Algiers. There are also in the Convent of Miraflores in the sills of the arches which look out on that most dreary of monastic graveyards some tiles which I believe to be Moorish

[Detailed drawing of a tile with caption: 'All the colours outlined in chocolate colour & the pattern [slightly?] raised Bright blue].⁵⁷

As Tim Youngs states, travel narratives are not purely the essence of an individual. Travellers 'observe and write according to established models' even when they wish to query or depart from them', and their narratives reflect culturally bound values.⁵⁸ Accordingly, and in agreement with Hagglund's claims aforementioned, in the above excerpt Bodichon is following an already established tradition of female travellers using the written medium to assert their expertise. And her epistolary voice is imbued with circulating understandings of the nature and value of (Arab, Spanish) culture. In turn, her judgement of the value and state of Spanish art is the result of an agentic intersection of discourses. She reappropriated the traditionally 'masculine' omniscient and commanding standpoint. She breaks with masculinist understandings of authorial power; and she takes in a feminist subject position that neutralizes the assessment of an unnamed male author (as Evans did with Ruskin) on the influence of the Arabs in

⁵⁶ Bodichon to Evans, France and Spain, [November - 16 December] 1866, Beinecke, Box 7.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Youngs, T. (1994) *Travellers in Africa. British Travelogues, 1850-1900* (Manchester: Manchester University Press) p.209.

Spanish art by virtue of her expertise as an artist resident in Algeria and as an experienced traveller. To assert her authority she resorts to a detailed drawing of a tile to support her claim – as if the visual provided her with a better medium to demonstrate her expertise. In her narrative Bodichon articulated a process of self-alienation that permits her to reaffirm and expand her artistic self-conception. Discovering the Arab influence on Spanish art and culture is translated into a reinforced artistic identity and into a renewed authorial voice now expanded to Arab-Spanish expertise. This self-alienation is articulated within a feminist epistolary voice that claims her and women's right to authorise themselves as cultural referents.

Bodichon's assertive tone as a self-aware insider contrasts with Evans' reply. Bodichon wrote her Spanish letters in view of suggesting and advising Evans on her own Spanish trip. Evans and George Lewes set off in January 1867, when Bodichon and Matilda Betham Edwards had already reached Algiers. Like her friend, Evans wrote detailed explanations of their sightseeing. But, aware of her position as an 'outsider', her tone is much more tentative than Bodichon's. From Saragossa, in the region of Aragón, she commented:

Perhaps if I had been in Africa, I should say as you do that the country reminded me of Africa: as it is, I think of all I have read about the East. The men who look on while others work at Saragossa also seem to belong to the East, with a great stripped blanket wrapped grandly round them, and a kerchief tied about their hair. But though Aragon was held by the Moors longer than any part of Northern Spain, the features and skins of the people seem to me to bear less traces of the mixture there must have been than one would fairly expect.⁵⁹

Undergoing the sort of *Bildung's* self-alienation as a result of travelling Bodichon experienced but moving away from her categorical assertions, Evans expresses her assessments more cautiously, with expressions such as 'seem to belong to the East' and 'seem to me to bear less traces'. Her reading about the East mediates her vision of North-Africa and raises in her expectations ('one would fairly expect') that are not fulfilled. Her first-hand experience of Spain teaches her that 'the features and skins of the people' in Aragón 'bear less traces of the mixture' with the Arabs 'than one would fairly expect'. Like Bodichon, Evans discovers Spain for the first time. And like her, Evans seems to undergo a critical

⁵⁹ Evans to Bodichon, 2 February 1867, Cross, J.W. (ed.) (1884) *George's Eliot's Life as Related in her Letters and Journals* (London: Harper and Brothers) p.233.

engagement with the unknown as effected by travelling. In her case, her first-hand experience teaches her a nuanced understanding of the colour of skin of people in the region of Aragón. Yet, not being able to claim her expertise as a resident in Algeria, Evans articulates her self-alienation in a more cautious tone than Bodichon. Ultimately, by giving credit to Bodichon's knowledge as an insider Evans further validated Bodichon's self-conception as an expert in Arab art and culture and, by extension, as knowledgeable in Spain.

Bodichon presented herself as an expert in foreign cultures with no signs of modesty, be it Spain, France, Algeria or America. As noted, she justified her authorial power on (Arab) art on grounds of her knowledge as an artist resident in Algeria and her know-how as a regular traveller. Similarly, during her American trip Bodichon projected in her letters her insider knowledge on the question of slavery. The institution of slavery was a recurrent theme in her American travel writing. Bodichon's grandfather, William Smith, had campaigned for the abolition of slavery against his business interests. A wholesale grocer who imported sugar, teas and spices, he joined the boycott of slave-produced sugar. He subscribed to the *Anti-slavery Reporter*, the abolitionist newspaper founded by Zachary Macaulay in 1825. As a MP for Sudbury, Suffolk, he, together with William Wilberforce among other politicians, introduced petitions against the slave trade in the late 1780s and early 1790s.⁶⁰ Her aunt Julia Smith was involved in the anti-slavery movement in the late 1830s – early 1840s. She campaigned against the apprenticeship system in the West Indies (overthrown in 1839) and against slavery in other parts of the world as auxiliary in the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. She attended the 1840 World's Anti-Slavery Convention in London, where she heard Thomas Clarkson paying tribute to her father (William Smith) and Wilberforce for their indefatigable work as abolitionists.⁶¹ Passing down this political engagement against slavery through her father's and aunt's campaigning, in America Bodichon went to several slave auctions on her own. She witnessed the reality of slavery and listened to the slaves' testimonies themselves. In her eyes, this first-hand experience made her a trustworthy commentator. Thus, in her letters she tore down myths about the institution of slavery in an authoritative tone. Both auctioneers and sellers welcomed her and

⁶⁰ Hirsch, P. (1998) pp.1-5.

⁶¹ Ibid, pp.29-30.

answered her questions politely. But Bodichon reported home how they distorted the truth about the slave trade: 'He [one of the auctioneers] said husbands could not be separated from wives, nor children until twelve from parents, that a slave if ill treated could demand a sale to change his master!'⁶² Her talk to both slaves and free blacks showed her that these cases were the exception rather than the rule. She concluded:

Before I went the young man in our house had said, "Well, I don't think there is anything to see – they sell them just like so many rocking chairs. There's no difference". And that is the truest word that can be said about the affair.⁶³

Bodichon's narratives on the question of slavery suggest that her experience of self-alienation was translated into a reaffirmation of her stance on slavery and into an empowering authorial position. She travelled to America with preconceptions about slavery. Following her family's tradition, she embraced abolitionism prior to her trip. Exposure to the reality of slavery not only confirmed her stance on slave trade and slave work but also empowered her with the authority of the insider. In her eyes, the credibility she gained as a witness of slavery conferred on her the authority to question works on this topic by other English visitors. She was disdainful of the publications by female social commentators Amelia Murray and Frederika Bremer. Drawing on the belief in the scientific method ('opinions are founded on very insufficient data'), she regarded their works as 'very poor books on a rich subject'. Exerting her narrative authority she justified her opinion on the grounds that these women were not exposed to the realities of slavery as she had been:

I have read tonight nearly all of Miss Murray's book which has any opinions or facts about slavery. Lately also I have read Miss Bremer, and not long ago Stirling, sir C. Lyell, and Dickens' notes – and all seem to me to be very poor books on a rich subject. The two ladies lived with ladies and polite gentlemen and saw nothing of the life of the lowly I have seen during my nine weeks in New Orleans – a hundred times more of the real facts of slavery than those two ladies – and yet I could not dare to give my opinions except to say their opinions are founded on very insufficient data and that the evils I see here are immense, and the corrupting influence of this system so bad, so deep, that it seems almost impossible to exaggerate it. ... My

⁶² Bodichon's diary-letters to her family, New Orleans, 26 December 1857, Reed, J.W. (ed.) (1972) p.70.

⁶³ Bodichon's diary-letters to her family, New Orleans, 13 February 1858, Ibid, p.105.

acquaintance with them has shown me much of African and New Orleans life which no English lady ever saw before.⁶⁴

Bodichon denounced not only the slave owners but also 'all in America who would exclude the dusky skinned from the light of knowledge and the blessings of freedom which here all the white race so abundantly enjoys'.⁶⁵ As discussed in the previous section, Bodichon's process of self-alienation in America led her to reconsider her understanding of freedom in England by comparison with her host country. Yet, as this excerpt further attests, she teased out the limits of this 'real' freedom by pointing out 'the class of white over black'. Her critical engagement with this aspect of American difference was turned into a new area of expertise for Bodichon. Ultimately, Bodichon fashioned a subject position that, putting into play the belief in the scientific method, she discredits already published works and takes on a self-assertive subject position that, in fashioning her identity as a female traveller, contributes to redefine the category of 'woman traveller' as one capable of informed and reliable expertise.

We do not have the letters Bodichon's family may have written to her in reply during her American trip. Therefore, we cannot know how her self-projections informed by her experience of self-alienation in America were 'answered'. But a letter that Mathew Davenport Hill sent to Bodichon suggests that 'various friends' 'urged' her to publish them (most probably because of her comments on the question of slavery). Davenport-Hills' letter sounds polite and cautious but he eventually encourages her to publish and tactfully suggests some editing:

I cannot venture to give advice upon the step you have been urged by various friends to take. But I may say that the perusal of your Diary afforded me so much information that was both new & highly interesting that I should myself rejoice to progress it in print. I believe however that should you decide to give it this permanent form there are passages you would find it desirable to omit.⁶⁶

So far, Bodichon's epistolary narratives suggest a positive outcome of her self-alienation as effected by travelling. By critically incorporating difference into her self-conception she disrupted sanctioned modes of womanhood. Her

⁶⁴ Bodichon's diary-letters to her family, [New Orleans], 11 February 1858, Reed, J.W. (ed.) (1972) p.99.

⁶⁵ Bodichon's diary-letters to her family, [Augusta], 14 March [1858], Ibid, p.131.

⁶⁶ Mathew Davenport Hill to Bodichon, 8 September 1859, GCPP Bodichon 12/7.

epistolary challenge to femininity was prompted by her versatile articulation of self-alienation. Each set of correspondences permitted her to venture into different self-images that each challenged gender normativity in a distinct way. Writing to her sisters, she explored the freedom of unchaperoned travelling in the form of exciting socialization with young men. Writing to her maternal aunt, she worked out a feminist understanding of wifedom at the heart of her marital union. Writing to her family on her father's side, she revised her political outlook and reaffirmed her self-conception as a politically committed citizen. However, Bodichon's self-alienation could also be undertaken only partially. On certain occasions she absorbed passively certain discriminatory assumptions. In other words, Bodichon's self-alienation and its gender resignification occasionally took place at the expense of certain social categories.

Thus, in some of her letters, Bodichon's epistolary "I" discloses a self-refashioning that seems to be partly triggered by the rather androcentric gaze with which she viewed other people and cultures and by which she was viewed. This other aspect of her epistolary self-projections suggests that Bodichon's openness to difference was at times only partially achieved. As discussed in chapter 3, *Bildung's* ideal of self-alienation implies distancing from one's self and one's beliefs as a way of acquiring an open attitude towards new perspectives. It is the responsibility of individuals to broaden their mindsets. Against this ideal, Bodichon's travel letters also reveal to what extent her outlook was caught by unchallenged prejudices.

As previous examples showed, during her Spanish trip Bodichon projected herself as an expert traveller by offering practical advice and sightseeing recommendations. Simultaneously, drawing on the dominant bourgeois discourse of British economic, political and cultural superiority, she used her authorial power to justify the appropriation of Spanish artwork. For she judged that the Spaniards were uncultured people, full of 'ignorance, stupidity and greed', and incapable of taking care of their own artistic treasures.⁶⁷ Having pointed out the poor state of Spanish monuments she concluded:

It is really pitiful to see so much pure beauty unappreciated everywhere here in Spain. I really am quite reconciled to England buying up everything for the South Kensington Museum! That

⁶⁷ Bodichon to Evans, France and Spain, [November - 16 December] 1866, Beinecke, Box 7.

seemed to me wicked before I came & saw how utterly the best things are uncared for here.⁶⁸

Conceiving the epistolary “I” as the locus of an agentic engagement with an intersectionality of discourses, Bodichon’s conclusion reveals her articulation of the feminist claim of women’s right to an authorial voice within a mindset that took for granted British middle-class superiority – a dominant discourse she shared with her social counterparts.⁶⁹ Reflecting the kind of partial self-alienation outlined above, in her epistolary narrative Bodichon was caught in cultural assumptions she did not call into question. In this sense, by drawing on this middle-class discourse she contributed to circulating and thus reaffirming this cultural prejudice. While she contributed to redefining the category female traveller as an observer capable of expertise, she did so at the expense of leaving unchallenged an element that underpinned white (upper-) middle-class western travelling more generally: the belief in the superiority of Western culture over the backward Other.

This partial openness to difference is also present in her feminist outlook – which fuelled her individuality. Travel letters served Bodichon to contribute to the women’s rights campaigns from wherever she was staying. She used letters to report and forge transatlantic links among women’s rights supporters and social reformers. For example, during the women’s higher education campaign, Bodichon, writing from Algeria, gave Caroline Dall updates on the unfolding of the movement and sent her copies of the printed circulars that were disseminated as manifestos.⁷⁰ Bodichon also contributed to the launch of the women’s suffrage movement. Originated within the Kensington Society, Bodichon wrote from Algeria one of the two papers that triggered the formation of the first female suffrage committee in Britain (the other being Helen Taylor’s, sent from Avignon).⁷¹ Back in England, to some of her feminist co-workers Bodichon wrote

⁶⁸ Bodichon to Evans, France and Spain, [November - 16 December] 1866, Beinecke, Box 7.

⁶⁹ See for example Hollis, P. (ed.) (1974) *Pressure from Without in Early Victorian England* (London: Edward Arnold).

⁷⁰ See for example Bodichon to Caroline Dall, Alger, Afrique, February 1862, Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁷¹ Simon-Martin, M. (2010) ‘Letter Exchange in the Life of Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon: The First Female Suffrage Committee in Britain Seen through her Correspondence’, in Fillard, C. and Orazi, F. (eds) *Exchanges and Correspondence. The Construction of Feminism* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing) pp.188-213.

courteous businesslike letters that kept her engaged in the women's movement in spite of the distance.

In her letters, Bodichon projected herself unfailingly as a committed feminist campaigner. As a women's rights activist, she reported on her feminist endeavours to her American colleagues, presenting herself as a leading figure in the social reform movement in England. She kept them updated of the steady progress of her feminist projects.⁷² In private, Bodichon confided to some of her best friends the inner difficulties she encountered in making these endeavours prosper. Against a background of clashing temperaments and opposing feminist outlooks at the heart of Langham Place, Bodichon spoke favourably of the often recalcitrant Emily Davies and defended Maria Rye, the secretary of the Female Middle-Class Emigration Society, against those who found her collaboration uncongenial.⁷³ Likewise, at some point Bodichon became disappointed with the modest tone that *The English Woman's Journal* was taking. When she contributed financially to found it in 1858 she had hoped it would become a political instrument for women's rights. While she encouraged her American friends to subscribe to it and sent them copies,⁷⁴ to her close friend Marian Evans she criticized Parkes, the editor in chief, for writing unrealistically of the spectacular success of *The English Woman's Journal*.⁷⁵ In these letters she made sense of her fragmented self and tried to reconcile her nomadic lifestyle with her artistic, philanthropic and feminist projects.

Independently of these tensions within the women's movement, Bodichon's feminist outlook may be interpreted as genuinely intended towards personal and social betterment: in favour of her own and, more generally, women's access to education, employment, legal and political rights. However, as in her pamphlets, articles, and paintings, her epistolary narratives remain unclear about who she included as feminist subjects. I have already pointed out Bodichon's problematic bourgeois standpoint in the letter she wrote to Parkes referring to Elizabeth Siddall. Likewise, Bodichon's letters written from Algeria

⁷² For example Bodichon to Dorothea Dix, Loch Long Scotland, 18 August 1858, Harvard University, Houghton Library, Dorothea Lynde Dix Papers 1802-1887, MS Am 1838, Box 2 Folder 65.

⁷³ Bodichon to Emily Blackwell, [Algeria], 11-13 February 1862, Harvard University, Schlesinger Library, Elizabeth Blackwell Collection, Box 13 Folder 185.

⁷⁴ See for example Bodichon to Caroline Dall, 5 Blandford Square, London, 21 June [early 1860s], Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁷⁵ Bodichon to Evans, [Algeria], 26 April [1859], Beinecke, Box 7.

leave native women out of the autonomous subjectivity she claimed for herself and for other feminist subjects. In a letter she sent to Evans during her first trip to the African continent (1856), Bodichon wrote:

we went to see the women of an Arab Prince I can hardly bear to write about the visit – it was so painful to me – picturesque enough but what a life! I hope to God they have no souls or they must be more miserable than the miserablest thing thinking in the world. Fatima or (Fatuma as they call it here) has a little daughter so pretty so graceful with such a power of undeveloped thought in her beautiful strait forehead that when I thought of her just 11 (the marriageable age) going probably to be tossed out of her home (so dreary little a home) into the house of some strange man whom she will never see before she becomes his property, the tears came [unreadable] into my eyes & I seized her suddenly with rather a rough grasp & as I kissed her, dear little gracious creature! with feelings mountains above her comprehension. I renewed every vow I ever made over wretched women to do all in my short life with all my small strength to help them. Believing that as water finds it[s] level & the smallest stream fr.[om] the High Reservoir mounts any where [*sic*] as high as that is a water so that freedom & justice we English women struggle for today will surely run someday into these low places.⁷⁶

As this excerpt shows, Bodichon reconceptualised herself as a women's rights campaigner as a result of her encounter with the female Other. This reformulation delimited the boundaries of her feminism to the exclusion of native women as autonomous subjects. Bodichon's exposure to difference reaffirmed her feminist self-conception (as exposure to 'real freedom' reaffirmed her political beliefs). But instead of revising certain elements of her feminist self-conception (as she partially put into question 'freedom' in England), she did not redefine her feminism inclusively. The process of incorporating critically the unknown into her sense of self was translated into a rather monolithic western feminist stance. As in the previous example, the subject position that Bodichon takes in this narrative draws on the narrative of feminist solidarity at the same time as she adopts unchallenged a slightly patronizing understanding of non-western civilizations – a dominant discourse she shared with many of her social counterparts. That is, her critical engagement with discursive traditions took place only partially. By doing so, Bodichon contributed to making the 'backward' treatment of women in

⁷⁶ Bodichon to Evans, Algeria, 21 November/8 December 1856, Beinecke, Box 7.

Algeria emblematic of the colonized culture. 'Liberating' women from this presumed subjugation was often used to justify colonial policy.⁷⁷

As a result, as in the case of working-class women, Bodichon included Other women not as feminist subjects but as 'needy' objects of her feminism. Indeed, as Cherry writes in *Beyond the Frame*, 'The forces that shaped the western [feminist] activist and her sense of herself as an autonomous subject simultaneously subjected the 'native female' to the relays of colonial and imperial power'.⁷⁸ The feminist claim to liberal individualism (that underpins Bodichon's statement in favour of women's professional self-realization, for instance – discussed in chapter 7) went hand in hand with the exclusion of native women, whose condition was 'degraded', for example, by the type of child marriage Bodichon describes in her letter. She condemned arranged marriages in favour of 'equal unions', which is what she considered her own to be. As Cherry argues, this companionate love (as opposed to polygamy and arranged marriages) was one of many imperialist markers of western feminism.⁷⁹ Against supposedly oppressed and inferior Algerian women, Bodichon reconceptualised herself as a feminist within a nationalist identity where English women struggled for (and eventually enjoyed) 'freedom & justice'. Consequently, native women (and working-class women like Elizabeth Siddall), excluded from autonomous subjectivity, became the object of philanthropic concern.

In this sense, Bodichon's feminist outlook resonates with Humboldt's understanding of mutual tolerance between cultures. In his essay 'Plan for a Comparative Anthropology', Humboldt writes that 'each man and each community must respect the morality and the culture of the other; never violate them, but, where it can be done, aid in their refinement and intensification'.⁸⁰ On that account, the 'respect' of the 'morality and the culture of the other' is in fact translated into assistance for 'their refinement'. Like Humboldt, Bodichon most probably felt a sincere compassion for Fatima and meant to offer generous help. But her rather ethnocentric approach, like Humboldt's, denotes a standpoint that

⁷⁷ Saul, J.M (2003) *Feminism. Issues and Arguments* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) p.269.

⁷⁸ Cherry, D. (2000) p.60.

⁷⁹ Ibid, p.62.

⁸⁰ Humboldt, W. von (1795) 'Plan for a Comparative Anthropology', p.380f, in Cowan, M. (ed.) (1963) p.125.

took for granted western cultural superiority and the Other's 'need' for 'enlightened/civilized' assistance.

Ultimately, Bodichon published a series of articles on each of her areas of expertise, establishing herself as an authority. She published on prostitution in *The Leader*; on travelling in *Temple Bar*; and on slavery, Algerian and French society and topography, and women's education, employment, suffrage and emigration in the *Englishwoman's Journal* and *MacMillan's Magazine*. Most notably she published a piece on Kabyle pottery in the prestigious *Art Journal*. At a time when working seemed to compromise a woman's lady status, she was nonetheless unashamedly proud to be paid for her writing and painting productions. Some of her papers were read at the annual meetings of the Social Science Association next to leading personalities such as Mary Carpenter and were duly published in their *Transactions*. Evocative of their methodological relevance, an examination of the letters *addressed to* and *about* Bodichon as well as newspaper reviews of her activities suggests that Bodichon was indeed associated with artistry and social reform. She was addressed as such and was consulted as an expert. This is the case for instance of her contribution to the 1858 Royal Commission on Popular Education. Officially recognizing her efforts as an educationist as the principal of Portman Hall, Bodichon was asked to give testimony to the commission investigating the provision of education for working-class children. She was one of the twelve women who were called on for their expertise.⁸¹ The name and position she acquired in the philanthropist, reformist and artistic *milieu* fed the sense of authority she privately expressed in her travel letters. In turn, her published (travel) writing legitimated her authorial power.

As the examples of these two sections illustrate, Bodichon presented herself as a female traveller – intrepid and politically committed and expert in travelling, aesthetic and social questions – in a slightly different way to each of her correspondents. She adapted her epistolary "I" accordingly. Bodichon projected a versatile articulation of her self so as not to break social codes of letter-exchange. In *Bildung's* terms, each epistolary enactment – her multiple epistolary "I"s – reveals a nuanced articulation of her self-alienation. In the process, Bodichon critically engaged with (gender) normativity. And this epistolary identity

⁸¹ Hirsch, P. (1998) p.243.

resignification constitutes an essential part of Bodichon's *Bildung* process of carving out her individuality.

Conclusion

Drawing on Humboldt's idea of travelling as a source of learning, in this chapter I discussed the significance of travelling and epistolary travel writing in Bodichon's identity formation at the intersection of her activities as an artist, feminist and philanthropist. In line with Frédéric Regard's and Kristi Siegel's analysis of identity transformation effected by encountering the Other, I examined how Bodichon's travelling – her nomadic lifestyle – brought about exposure to the unknown which acted as input to her identity formation and how she projected an articulation of *Bildung*'s process of self-alienation in her travel letters. I argued that she verbalized a versatile self-projection as a female traveller through the epistolary medium by virtue of the multiplicity of correspondents to whom she wrote. I suggested that her exposure to difference is translated into multiple epistolary "I"s: an adventurous mediator of 'Eastern' culture, a self-assertive wife at the heart of her marriage, a self-critical politically committed woman, and a confident insider, expert in aesthetics and social reform. These versatile epistolary travel narratives stand for a nuanced articulation of her self-alienation as effected by her nomadic lifestyle – how she incorporated the unknown through travelling into her sense of self. In this chapter I also suggested that letters acted as a space where Bodichon individuated her subjectivity. Conforming to *Bildung*'s critical attitude towards society, letters functioned as forums where she engaged with discursive traditions such as discourses on Otherness, narratives of the 'picturesque', the belief in British superiority, and prevailing notions of bourgeois femininity. I argued that, nonetheless, Bodichon's was a counter-hegemonic viewpoint within limits. For, failing to overcome certain prejudices, her resulting standpoint was caught by certain classist and colonialist assumptions, contributing to 'malestream' discourses on middle-class superiority and Otherness.

By travelling around Europe, North-America and North-Africa with the purpose of discovering new landscapes, cultures and people; by setting out on sketching expeditions while her husband went on long walks; by travelling back to

England every spring, often without him, to keep up with her philanthropic and feminist projects, Bodichon presented herself as a woman who asserted her right to personal self-fulfilment. Both in the public and private self-images she circulated, Bodichon acted out the role of an independent woman at the heart of her marital union. In the following chapter I discuss how letters functioned as forums where Bodichon mobilized ongoing discourses to negotiate her exercise of personal autonomy – understood here as one's capacity to act in harmony with one's evolving self-conception. In chapter 7, I explore the significance of letter-writing in Bodichon's negotiation of self-determination.

7 Autonomy

Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the last dimension of *Bildung* I highlight in this thesis: personal autonomy. Drawing on Diana Meyers' conceptualization of autonomy (whereby self-determining individuals are those who act in harmony with their evolving self-conception and which, as noted in section 3.4.1., resonates with Humboldt's understanding of harmonious self, where the outer (action) is in accord with the inner (the self)), I explore the significance of letters in Barbara Bodichon's struggle for autonomy: her striving for acting conforming to her sense of self. In line with *Bildung*'s notion of critical engagement with the world and self-determining action, in this chapter I suggest that Bodichon (partially) negotiated her exercise of autonomy in dialogue with her correspondents. Simultaneous to the act of communicating, letters functioned as forums where Bodichon projected an articulation of her struggle for self-determination. As I suggested in the previous chapter, in the process of verbalizing an epistolary self-image, letters acted as a space where Bodichon mobilized on-going discourses. That is, her epistolary "I" is the locus of an agentic engagement with a matrix of discursive traditions. In *Bildung*'s terms, Bodichon (partially) worked out in letters her self-determining action, which involved discourse reappropriation.

Thus, in this chapter I examine Bodichon's intersubjective epistolary negotiation of autonomy at the intersection of her feminist, philanthropic and artistic self-conception. In the process of fashioning her self-images in dialogue with her correspondents, Bodichon (partially) worked out her autonomy determined by the distinct features of the genre of letter-writing. Questions of audience, purpose, memory, letter-writing codes, letter-exchange conventions, and conditions of production and reception are some of the factors that delimited/enabled the articulation of her self-projection as a self-determining agent. My suggestion is that Bodichon managed to exercise autonomy. At the same time, in this chapter I discuss how, resonating with the idea of partial self-

alienation (see chapter 6), in her claim to self-fulfilment she occasionally foreclosed autonomy on others.¹

7.1 *Bildung's Self-Determination in Bodichon's Letters*

As noted, Bodichon spent her childhood and teenage years mostly between Hastings and London. There she received a 'peculiar' education monitored by a governess, a series of tutors and painting masters. Her educational scheme was complemented by educative family trips, sketching expeditions, and literary and political gatherings at home. During her late teens and early twenties, letter-exchange permitted Bodichon and her female friends to be in contact with each other. It also provided them with the space for expressing friendship love, explaining anecdotes, talking about intimate feelings, giving personal opinions (very often triggered by readings and their other education activities), offering advice as well as projecting life expectations.

In an unpublished essay, Humboldt states that sociality is intrinsic to man's self-understanding. For it is through contrasting his "I" with society's "you" that he gains self-awareness:

man is a social animal (and this is his distinctive character), because he needs other creatures like himself not for protection, not for help, nor for procreation nor for his life of habit and custom (all of which a number of animal species also do) but because he reaches consciousness of self, because an "I" without a "Thou" is unimaginable to his reason and his sense – for this reason does the individuality of his sociality (his Thou) tear itself off simultaneously with that of his own individuality (his I).²

As I discussed in section 3.4., I work on the assumption that self-awareness is not self-transparent. Autonomous agents are driven by reason as well as by emotions and desires of which they may not be aware. But, following Humboldt's notion of contact with the other as a source of self-understanding, my suggestion is that, as a site of dialogical (self-) reflection and self-expression, letter-writing functioned as space where Bodichon worked out her self-determination (which,

¹ This chapter draws on Simon-Martin, M. (forthcoming 2012) 'More Beautiful than Words and Pencil Can Express': Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon at the Interface of her Epistolary and Visual Self-Projections', in Gabaccia, D. and Maynes, M.J. (eds) 'Gender History across Epistemologies' (Special Issue) *Gender and History*, 24 (3).

² Humboldt, W. von (1814) 'Observations on World History', p.355, in Cowan, M. (ed.) (1963) p.72.

as I will show, requires a certain level of self-awareness). Letter-writing created a space for Bodichon and her friends to confide their inner feelings and to lay out their personal views. In the course of their epistolary conversations these young women articulated their gendered subjectivity and developed a sense of self. As discussed in chapters 5 and 6, gendered subjectivity was developed and displayed dialogically. Sharing with a confidante her reflections on the dilemmas she confronted as a young woman, in her letters Bodichon worked out the choices that entailed becoming an adult – including the possibility of pursuing an artistic career and devoting her life to social reform. Friendship correspondence reveals Bodichon as a rational agent that expressed her voice on issues that supported her life choices. In Meyers' conceptual vocabulary, letters functioned as forums where Bodichon worked out her self-discovery ('to know what one is like'), self-definition ('to establish one's own standards and to modify one's qualities to meet them') and self-direction ('to express one's personality in action') – in short, her life plan. As mentioned in chapter 3, self-direction can be programmatic (to direct one's life in the long run, where a person asks herself what kind of life they want to live, what qualities they want to have, what types of interpersonal relations they want to be involved in, what talents they want to develop) and episodic (when a person confronts a (new) situation and asks herself what she can do that is in harmony with her self-conception).

In turn, Bodichon's intersubjective epistolary negotiation of self-determination extended not only between her and her female friends during her youth but also between Bodichon and the many other close friends to whom she confided her thoughts throughout her life – like Marian Evans, the Blackwell sisters, Anna Jameson, and William Allingham. Bodichon's widened epistolary circle illustrates Humboldt's understanding of man as a relational being and social interaction as nurturing one's self-development (see section 6.2.). In Humboldt's view, 'the more his [man's] capacities grow [as a result of stimulating intercourse], the wider the circle with which he needs to keep in contact'.³ Accordingly, Bodichon's correspondents' responses fuelled her articulation and revision of her self-determining action all along her lifespan. For, as noted in chapter 3, life plans are dynamic and open to revision, always unfolding.

³ Humboldt, W. von (1823) 'To What Extent May one Judge the Cultural Level of the American Natives from their Linguistic Remains?', p.29, in Cowan, M. (ed.) (1963) p.70.

On that account, Bodichon worked out her life plan and underwent the self-aware deliberation processes of self-discovery and self-definition in her epistolary narratives in interaction with her correspondents. In other words, in her letters she negotiated her self-direction contingent to others. Concomitantly, Bodichon's textual self-presentations involved agentic action in the form of discourse reappropriation. For, as illustrated in chapter 4, there is an ideological "I" in each autobiographical act that occupies, contests, and revises a range of subject positions. Hence, drawing on norms of cultural intelligibility, Bodichon mobilized permeating discourses. That is, in her epistolary narratives she adopted, challenged and reappropriated (gender) normativity. Resonating with *Bildung's* idea of self-alienation leading to a critical outlook on society and to autonomy, letters acted as forums where Bodichon (partially) worked out her self-determination. In turn, the distinct features of the genre conditioned her epistolary articulation of her struggle for autonomy. However, as I will show, Bodichon's epistolary negotiation of self-determination occasionally negated this same autonomy to other social categories.

7.2 Bodichon's Artistic Self-Conception

During the preparations for the American Exhibition of British Art, critic William Rossetti wrote brief biographical sketches of the painters, referring to Bodichon as an 'amateur (I think) of great power'.⁴ Rossetti's dubitative remark suggests that, in spite of her confident artistic self-projection, Bodichon had a rather ambiguous artistic status during her lifetime. The Victorian art world was inimical to women. It was structured in sexual difference, where masculine and feminine artistic identities developed within relations of power. Female painters were excluded from most art schools and from membership of artistic institutions. They encountered impediments to exhibiting their works in the most prestigious galleries, selling their paintings for high prices, and receiving acclaim from the critical establishment.⁵ Hampered from pursuing their artistic ambitions through

⁴ Quoted in Hirsch, P. (1998) *Barbara Bodichon: Feminist, Artist and Rebel* (London: Chatto and Windus) p.160.

⁵ Cherry, D. (1993) *Painting Women: Victorian Women Artists* (London and New York: Routledge) pp.53-55.

official channels, women were ‘afflicted with the curse of amateurism’ – a sign of bourgeois femininity and the antithesis of masculine professional practice.⁶ Amateur female painters displayed their works in drawing-rooms or bound them in albums circulated among family and friends, and sold them for charitable purposes.⁷

Nonetheless, as Pam Hirsch suggests, Bodichon regarded herself as an artist. She indicated ‘artist’ and ‘painter’ in her marriage certificate and the 1881 census respectively.⁸ Bodichon’s epistolary narratives confirm this self-conception and are testimony to how she carved out an artistic identity that challenged, to a certain extent, men’s exclusive claims to professionalism. In her letters Bodichon worked out her autonomy: she negotiated her acting in accordance with her artistic self-conception within a male-dominated artistic community. In my interpretation, the feminist consciousness Bodichon developed throughout her life, most crucially during her early formative years, fuelled her artistic ambitions and achievements. Yet, as I will show, occasionally her feminist and philanthropic activities stood in tension with her artistic interests.

The following letter is an early testimony to Bodichon’s artistic becoming. In her early twenties she wrote to Bessie Parkes:

Dearest Bessie,
I have a quiat [*sic*] deal to say to you about work, & life, & the necessity of yr fixing early on a train of action, you I mean, what is so sad, so utterly black as a wasted life, & how common! – I believe there are thousands & tens of thousands who like you & I intend doing –, intend working – but live & die, only intending.
I know something lovely about two girls under 20 both, who being left with little money & no near relations, left England & established themselves in Edinbro’ & kept a school in the worst part, & fed & still feed a light & a strong light in a place of utter moral darkness
They do it still & are both very lively & happy & are perfectly independent travelling when necessary by themselves & all that, they devote all their time to this object [and they] are quite rewarded by the good which is visible that they do, to their own eyes & every ones[’]. Is not this very beautiful! I will tell you what I think about you when you come here
... I must explain what I have done, that is given up coloring (my dear color box is locked up for 6 months) “some natural tears I shed” or

⁶ Orr, C.C. (ed.) (1995) *Women in the Victorian Art World* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press) p.6.

⁷ Cherry, D. (1993) pp.53-55.

⁸ Hirsch, P. (1998) p.129 and p.303 respectively.

very nearly but I was so convinced of my inability to draw that it was not so difficult as I expected.
It was wretched work! Coloring without forms & so see me sticking to outlines & light & shadow Mrs. Scharf Aunt Julia & some other artists said “you may be an artist, for you love nature & color well, but you have never learnt to draw”
To be happy is to work, work – work – work – for ever [*sic*] But the soul must have some leisure, & that should be the [unreadable] with great souls, souls which can strengthen one another [*sic*], Alas! ...
Yrs affect
BLS⁹

Most probably written in the late 1840s, this excerpt is testimony to Bodichon’s early epistolary articulation of her artistic ambition triggered by her germinating feminist consciousness; that is, Bodichon’s negotiation of her wish to exercise her autonomy – understood as self-conception put into action. Drawing on the circulating narrative of the unfortunate genteel daughter who is forced to work on her father’s death (or bankruptcy), Bodichon laments the lives of those middle-class women who are caught in a spiral of drawing-room conversation and family visiting. Instead, she urges her friend (and by extension, herself) to fix ‘early on a train of action’. I interpret her claim, ‘To be happy is to work’, to mean an (un)paid purposeful occupation. Illustrative of this association between work and happiness is the example she gives of the two women who set up a school in Edinburgh.

Identifying herself, to a certain extent, with these two women and distancing herself from the ‘wasted’ lives of leisured bourgeois daughters, Bodichon is determined to unlock her artistic talent by training in drawing. Taking on board her friends and relatives’ criticism, she decides to focus on improving her drawing technique. Causality is difficult to demonstrate through epistolary narratives. But since we know from the school minutes that Bodichon took drawing lessons with Francis Cary in Bedford College in 1849, we can suggest that this letter was likely written before or during that year. It is possible that it was as a preliminary thought she shared with her friend before making the decision to improve her drawing techniques under the aegis of a professional teacher.

The ill-fortuned genteel girl was a circulating bourgeois discourse that the mid-Victorian ‘women’s rights women’ reappropriated to justify more

⁹ Bodichon to Parkes, [1847], Cambridge University, Girton College Archives, Girton College Personal Papers (GCPP) Parkes 5/165.

employment and education opportunities for women. In her publications, Bodichon herself intertwined it with a call to expand the range of employment available for women on the grounds of justice and self-fulfilment – a feminist approach that distinguished her from most of her co-workers. Nonetheless, like her colleagues, Bodichon's feminist stance is imbued with class tensions. In the above epistolary narrative, while Bodichon equates working with happiness, she also acknowledges the necessity for 'some leisure'. My interpretation is tentative because of an unreadable word (due to Bodichon's unclear handwriting) that precludes understanding the whole sentence. However, I suggest that her claim for leisure has a bourgeois connotation that resonates with Bodichon's problematic middle-class standpoint. Bodichon herself was able to write letters not only by reason of her advantaged social position (which guaranteed her the literacy and financial resources required to engage in letter-exchanges) but also due to the time she was granted to spend in self-development activities such as letter-writing – an amount of free time unaffordable among the working classes. Eventually, Bodichon's middle-class standpoint results in an outlook that takes for granted middle-class superiority vis-à-vis the lower ranks – another circulating discourse she shared with her social counterparts. An example is Bodichon's justification of the two women's lifestyle on the grounds that they enlighten the 'utter moral darkness' in which the people living 'in the worst part' of Edinburgh stand.

The above excerpt is an early testimony to Bodichon's unfolding artistic becoming – her struggle for self-determination. It articulates her first steps to become an artist (programmatic self-direction): she asserts her painting talent (self-discovery), claims her right to happiness through a self-fulfilling occupation, and expresses her determination to unlock her artistic potential by taking further training (self-definition). In her epistolary narrative, she individuated her sense of self as a painter drawing on contemporary discourses. Bodichon projected her self-image as a painter by challenging bourgeois domesticity, by reappropriating the 'unfortunate genteel woman' narrative, and by contributing to discourses on middle-class superiority.

In turn, Bodichon articulated this individuated self-conception conditioned by the distinct features of letter-writing. Bodichon's textual codification – her subject position within a discursive field – was mediated by memory, a meaning-creation mechanism that interpreted how Bodichon experienced knowing about

the story of the two philanthropic women. An understanding (not an exact reproduction) of what Bodichon was told about these two women (or knew first-hand about them), the above excerpt is embedded in the systems of signification on which Bodichon drew to produce it. Similarly, the intrinsic presence of the epistolary “you” determines the narrative strategies adopted by the epistolary “I”. Writing to a close friend meant that Bodichon followed informal letter-writing codes: addressing Parkes as ‘Bessie’, writing her letter with crossed out words, not following a formulaic narrative, and writing a rather unstructured text, seemingly without making a fresh copy of her letter. Likewise, unlike, say, her formal letters to acquaintances, it is to close friends such as Parkes that Bodichon confided her hopes and fears.

Following the letter-exchange code of reciprocity, Parkes replied by offering a personalized response to her friend’s epistolary narrative. Sharing codes of cultural intelligibility as well as congenial stances, Parkes indeed approved of taking on ‘a train of action’. A would-be poet, as noted, she published her first poems in *The Birmingham Journal* in the late 1840s. In response to Bodichon’s letter she wrote:

I want to have long talks with you. I am glad you are going to study form because I always thought your colouring much the best of the two; but I know it must have been very hard to put the paints away! You have painted a free life & a beautiful, in those two girls ... The worst situation for a noble continuation of labor is where all kinds of demands are made on time temper & spirits in a small domestic life, & among a heterogeneous mixture of people, & this is the case of most girls & women, & what makes hindrances to female improvements infinitely great. Now just suppose. Your Aunt Patty is an excellent person you say, but not suited to you individually; & when she is with you 6 weeks you feel restive in your mind. Now suppose two or three Aunt Pattys,¹⁰ all good in the main, but different to each other & not sympathising in any thing with you were to be always at your elbow, had great authority over your life, & suppose you felt bound by Christianity & reason to listen to all they said, & make them comfortable in their own way, & that every day in the year more or less you had this to do, & you have a sample of ordinary English life among many girls. When I see them wasting life it is often as deep a feeling of pity as of vexation that I feel. Goodbye dearest B.¹¹

¹⁰ According to Hirsch, Bodichon had an uneasy relationship with her aunt, Hirsch, P. (1998) p.17 and p.35.

¹¹ Parkes to Bodichon, [1847], GCPP Parkes 5/2.

In her letter, Parkes offers her friend constructive criticism along the lines of the recommendations given by 'Mrs. Scharf Aunt Julia & some other artists'. She agrees that she needs to train in drawing and she offers her commentary along with her sympathy ('I know it must have been very hard to put the paints away!'). Bodichon's story of the two Edinburgh girls triggers in Parkes her own reflection. She develops her argument against 'wasting life' among 'ordinary English' (middle-class) women by presenting a hypothetical situation that mobilizes discourses on self-fulfilling industriousness ('a noble continuation of labor'), Christian respect and kindness towards others ('bound by Christianity & reason to listen to all they said, & make them comfortable in their own way'), and a revised understanding of womanhood (the two Edinburgh sisters' endeavours are 'a free life & a beautiful').

The idea of 'two or three Aunt Pattys, all good in the main, but different to each other & not sympathising in any thing with you' resonates with Humboldt's idea of friction as leading to a more precise definition of individuality. Humboldt was persuaded that:

The diversity of resultant new conditions produces diversity and infuses new elements into opinions and ideas; the human spirit would perhaps never have attained some of its sublimest insights without the stimulating spectacle of violent and almost universal friction between various human powers.¹²

In her narrative Parkes seems to be negotiating her *Bildung*-like right to turn this friction of temperaments and outlooks among different people into an individuated subjectivity – hers and her friend's. The outcome of this reflection is an emphatic conclusion against the nullification of a woman's individuality and against preventing her potential from becoming 'noble ... labor': 'When I see them wasting life it is often as deep a feeling of pity as of vexation that I feel'. All in all, although we do not have Bodichon's reply to Parkes' letter, Parkes' epistolary criticism, encouragement and reflection probably contributed to reaffirming Bodichon's belief in 'the necessity of' fixing 'on a train of action' and her capacity to achieve it.

This interactive feedback with endless new beginnings extended along a chain of letters between Bodichon and her close friends. And it fuelled her

¹² Humboldt, W. von (1801) 'The Basques: Observations Made during a Trip through the Spanish and French Basque Country in the Spring of 1801', p.10, in Cowan, M. (ed.) (1963) p.71.

articulation of her (artistic) selfhood, which she most probably reformulated according to her correspondents' responses. Each letter written by Bodichon in this chain offers a snapshot of her process of (artistic) self-fashioning – her struggle for autonomy. In turn, she renegotiated her self-determination in her letters throughout her adulthood. In Meyers' conceptual vocabulary, Bodichon revised and adjusted her life plan adapting it to life contingencies and incorporating other interests developed throughout her adult life.

A comparison of Bodichon's self-projection as articulated in letters and paintings is beyond the scope of this thesis but, by way of illustration, Bodichon's early professional artistic self-conception was confidently asserted in 'Ye Newe Generation' (c.1850), an ink drawing sketched for private circulation.

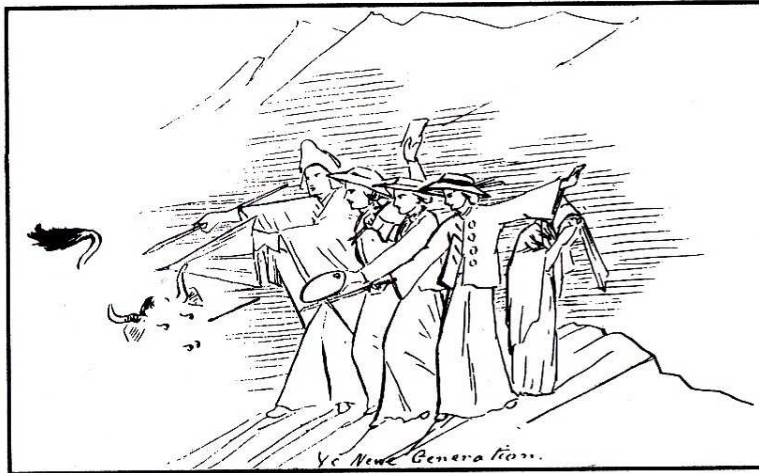


Figure 3: Barbara Bodichon, 'Ye Newe Generation' c.1850 (GCPP Bodichon 8/6, The Mistress and Fellows, Girton College, Cambridge).

The sketch illustrates four young women lined-up and firmly holding up a spear, an umbrella, a piece of paper, brushes, and a pallet. They are facing an unfinished sketch of a bull in a confident gesture of defiance. In the background, a woman at an angle hides her face in her hands as if crying. The drawing attests to Bodichon's claim for women's professional self-realization. Mobilizing the on-going discourse on dress reform publicized by contemporary feminist campaigners (including Bodichon in her publications), she depicts the four women in loose jackets and skirts, sturdy boots, and wide-brimmed hats. This is the attire she wore during her outdoor sketching sessions to produce the paintings she exhibited and sold.

Seemingly created for fun, addressed to a like-minded spectatorship, and exempt from 'the visual codes which regulated publicly exhibited paintings or published illustrations',¹³ 'Ye Newe Generation' is a positive statement in favour of women's right to a professional identity – here as painters and writers. Indeed, the conditions of production and consumption of this sketch created a favourable environment for Bodichon's overt subversion of the history of art's representation of women – rendered objects of masculine understandings of womanhood under the male gaze. The drawing captures a feminist politics of looking where female figures are represented as cultural producers. Circulated around family members (like 'Aunt Julia', who encouraged her artistic ambitions), and female friends (like Parkes who nurtured Bodichon's talent and aspired herself to become a poet), the spectatorship of this drawing can be read as confirming Bodichon's intended signification and approving of the confident professional self-image she wished to circulate.

The caption 'Ye Newe Generation' suggests an inclusive understanding of professional self-realization: the coming generation of female practitioners. Hirsch claims the four main figures in the drawing are Bodichon, would-be poet Bessie Rayner Parkes and fellow artists Anna Mary Howitt and Jane Benham.¹⁴ Deborah Cherry names painter Eliza Fox as the fourth character instead.¹⁵ Yet, as neither Bodichon nor her friends are easily recognisable, the drawing could be interpreted as Bodichon having in mind a collective understanding of the new generation of professional women. Nonetheless, the apparent inclusive message of this visual self-projection stands in tension with Bodichon's self-projections otherwise articulated. As noted in chapter 6, Bodichon's feminist outlook may be interpreted as genuinely intended towards personal and social betterment: in favour of her own and, more generally, women's access to education, employment, legal and political rights. But her epistolary (and visual) narratives remain unclear about who she included as feminist subjects. I have already highlighted Bodichon's problematic bourgeois standpoint in Bodichon's letter writing about the Edinburgh women. Her class basis is equally evident in the letter she wrote to Parkes referring to Siddall, quoted in the Introduction, where Bodichon treated

¹³ Deborah, C. (2000) *Beyond the Frame: Feminism and Visual Culture, 1850-1900* (London and New York: Routledge) p.46.

¹⁴ Hirsch, P. (1998) p.118.

¹⁵ Cherry, D. (1993) p.47.

Siddall as an object of philanthropic concern instead of as a fellow-artist. Likewise, as mentioned in chapter 6, Bodichon's letters written from Algeria leave native women out of the kind of autonomous subjectivity she claimed for herself and other feminist subjects.

The watercolour landscapes Bodichon produced throughout her life provide additional snapshots of her professional artistic becoming. They stand for her professional self-conception – distinctly articulated within the norms of visual representation. Bodichon's landscapes contributed to redefining the category of female artist: she claimed landscapes as a legitimate theme for a woman painter and asserted her right to paint *en plein air*. Indeed, the academic hierarchy privileged historical representations in oil, relegating female artists to household scenes and still-life. Inner settings were partly justified on the grounds of the presumed weak nature and systematic ill-health among middle-class women. These beliefs were used against them painting outdoors, making of physical frailty a sign of bourgeois femininity.¹⁶ In her landscapes Bodichon claimed her right to sketch out of doors, with its concomitant 'unfeminine' outfit; in short, her right to adopt the professional attitude required to produce a high standard landscape – worth exhibiting, selling and reviewing.

Bodichon's epistolary narratives also reveal her unconformity to the artistic canon and further attest to her challenge to men's exclusive claims to professionalism. As noted, dismantling notions of female propriety and modesty, she privately confessed to rejoice at getting praise for her drawings and making money out of the paintings she sold – which indicates she respected and sought to be part of the artistic community. At the same time, Bodichon also reasserted her artistic self-worth independently of the establishment. Writing from London in 1862 she confided to her friend William Allingham:

I wish you could see my pictures. I have been ambitious and had a disappointment – refused at the R.[oyal] A.[cademy] – I sent a monster in oil. I am not disheartened at all and I love my art more than ever – in fact more in proportion to other loves than ever for I confess the enthusiasm with which I used to leave my easel and go to teach at the school [Portman Hall] or help Bessie in her affairs [as editor of *The English Woman's Journal*] is wearing off, and if it were not that at thirty-five one has acquired habits which happily cannot be broken I should not go on as I do; I could not *begin* as I used ten years ago at any of these dusty dirty attempts to help one's poor

¹⁶ Cherry, D. (1993) pp.24-25.

fellow creatures, and it is quite natural that my life abroad and out of doors should make me more enterprising for board-hunts or painting excursions, than for long sojourns in stifling rooms with miserable people.¹⁷

This epistolary narrative is testimony to Bodichon's artistic unfolding: how she negotiates acting in accordance with her evolving self-conception. The narrative attests to her reconsideration of her self-direction at a particular moment in her early middle age – how she revises her life plan by incorporating her evolving interests and priorities. In her narrative she articulates her discovery of what she 'really' enjoys doing – painting over social reform (self-discovery). Simultaneously, she reaffirms her artistic self-belief by making sense of 'a disappointment' (self-definition). She decides to leave her campaigning in the background in order to focus on her painting within a renewed self-confidence despite the rebuff received (self-direction). In her letter Bodichon privately articulates her renewed artistic confidence by mobilizing a series of beliefs and assumptions. She takes for granted her class-based leisured lifestyle ('and it is quite natural that my life abroad and out of doors should make me more enterprising for board-hunts or painting excursions, than'); and she positions herself as a bourgeois woman within a mindset that refers to working-class people as 'miserable' 'poor fellow creatures'. Distancing herself from them and reaffirming her middle-class positioning, Bodichon claims her right to artistic self-fulfilment as a full member of the artistic community despite her temporary difficulties. That is, in line with the idea of partial self-alienation, Bodichon challenges bourgeois domesticity in favour of her right to personal self-realization; but, in resorting to a reappropriation of a slightly patronizing philanthropic approach, she is claiming her autonomy at the expense of other social categories.

In the above epistolary narrative Bodichon articulates her artistic confidence within a tense juxtaposition of selves. As the first letter excerpt quoted in this section showed and as I will further examine in the following sections, her feminism was embedded in her (artistic) self-image; it fuelled her self-determination. Contrary to this apparent complementariness of elements within her self-conception, this epistolary narrative reveals a colliding relation between her feminist, philanthropist and artistic endeavours – a contention that, as

¹⁷ Bodichon to William Allingham, [July 1862], Allingham, H. and Williams, E.B. (eds) (1911) *Letters to William Allingham* (Longmans, Green and Co.) p.77.

pointed out by biographers (see chapter 2), ultimately made difficult her engagement with the London-based women's movement. Bodichon struggled to combine her different interests. Bodichon's letter to Allingham exemplifies how she articulated in her letters her struggle to reconcile her artistic, feminist and philanthropic endeavours.

All in all, Bodichon carved out an individuated identity as a professional female artist that challenged dominant discourses on femininity. For she held claim of her desire for self-fulfilment against the dominant view that expected bourgeois women to attend their (male) relatives' needs and interests. True to her artistic ambitions, Bodichon did pursue a quite distinguished career as a professional painter – including after her marriage – that seems to have fulfilled her aspirations. She exhibited her work at the Royal Academy, the Royal Society of British Artists, and in solo at the French Gallery in London for instance.¹⁸ Her artistic career can be said to be the result of her struggle for autonomy – her self-conception put into action.

Bodichon's activities were reviewed in the press. A discursive reading of newspaper reviews on Bodichon's public activities to contrast them with her epistolary artistic self-projections is beyond the scope of this thesis. But reading newspapers for their content, 'Madame Bodichon' was frequently referred to as a watercolour 'artist',¹⁹ 'completely associated with Algiers'.²⁰ Although not all reviews were unanimously complimentary, her landscape works were judged to be of 'indeed very considerable artistic merit',²¹ 'full of a gay natural beauty'²² and 'always full of character'.²³ Her African paintings were judged to be 'full of force and beauty'.²⁴ Likewise, her Hastings seascapes were regarded as 'well painted, and full of truth to nature'.²⁵ Eventually, the artistic community seems to have recognised her talent. For, eventually, she received several silver and gold medals awarded by different artistic bodies such as the Royal Society of Painters in

¹⁸ Hirsch, P. (1998) p.373.

¹⁹ See for example, [Anonymous] (1866) 'From our London Correspondent', *The Leeds Mercury*, Tuesday 5 June, [unknown Issue], [unknown page].

²⁰ [Anonymous] (1866) 'Algerian Pictures and Sketches by Mme Bodichon and Mrs. F. Lee Bridell', *Daily News*, Thursday 7 June, Issue 6268, p.3.

²¹ [Anonymous] (1861) 'The French Gallery', *Daily News*, Monday 15 April, Issue 4657, p.2.

²² [Anonymous] (1861) 'The Pictures of the Year', *The Examiner*, Saturday 27 April, Issue 2778, p.263.

²³ [Anonymous] (1869) 'The Society of Female Artists', *Daily News*, Thursday 11 February, Issue 7108, p.5.

²⁴ [Anonymous] (1868) 'Society of Female Artists', *The Examiner*, Saturday 1 February, Issue 3131, p.73.

²⁵ [Anonymous] (1871) 'The Dudley Gallery', *The Examiner*, Saturday 11 February, Issue 3289, p.151.

Watercolours, the Crystal Palace Company and the London International Exhibition of All Fine Arts, Industries and Inventions, in recognition of her talent.²⁶

Yet, in line with Rossetti's dubitative description of Bodichon for the American Exhibition of British Art, suggestive of their methodological significance to further assess Bodichon's *Bildung*, *letters about* Bodichon suggest that her status as a painter remained ambiguous between the professional and amateur practice. An illustrative example is a letter Dr Elizabeth Blackwell sent to her sister Dr Emily Blackwell at the beginning of 1875. The image that emerges from her epistolary narrative reveals amateur elements in Bodichon's practice:

Barbara is well, and as full of social life and sympathy as ever always helping somebody in her own odd way, and attracting quantities of varied people to her. Her house is becoming quite a museum of pretty and queer things; the taste for painting tiles and pottery has given place to painting flowers on wooden panels, on a gold ground, and she is executing an order for a set. She made a good deal of money in the course of the year by selling pictures and other things - between 4 & 5 hundred pounds, I think she made last year; and the practice seems to be accepted by her friends - and I know other ladies of fortune who do the same thing. It hardly seems to me fair, for she takes advantage of her large acquaintance, and her easy establishment, and sells largely to her friends or acquaintance - it seems like entering into rather unfair competition with that mass of struggling women artists who can hardly keep their heads above water And yet on the other hand, it is very important to break down the prejudice against paid work and also to bring the easy classes into practical work - And as Barbara is very generous in many ways, I suppose we must on the whole, approve of her turning her talents and position to account. She endowed little Alfred²⁷ with £200 from her last years picture sale.²⁸

Suggestive of her amateur status is Bodichon's Robertsbridge cottage turned into a kind of informal showroom ('Her house is becoming quite a museum of pretty and queer things'). She made 'a good deal of money' but she sold 'largely to her friends or acquaintances' and donated part of the benefits to philanthropic causes ('She endowed little Alfred with £200 from her last years

²⁶ Awarded for her 'Hastings Fishing Boats Coming in', exhibited in the Crystal Palace, [Anonymous] (1873) 'The Crystal Palace Picture Galleries', *Daily News*, Monday 28 April, Issue 8425, p.3; [Anonymous] (1873) [Untitled], *The Graphic*, Saturday 10 May, Issue 180, p.447. The medals are held at GCPP Bodichon 8.

²⁷ Alfred Clemens was the illegitimate child of one of Bodichon's servants, Hirsch, P. (198) p.288-289.

²⁸ Elizabeth Blackwell to Emily Blackwell, Braemar House, Belvedere Road, Upper Norwood, 18 January 1875, Harvard University, Schlesinger Library, Elizabeth Blackwell Collection, Box 3 Folder 47.

picture sale'). She also offered them to friends and institutions.²⁹ In her letter, Blackwell circulated and thus reaffirmed Bodichon's image as a consolidated artist (the self-image Bodichon projected in her own letters). But she did so within a framework that contributed to reinforcing Bodichon's ambiguous professional/amateur status. By approving of Bodichon's activities in spite of her 'unfair competition', Blackwell sought to change society's understanding of women painters and women earning money. But, by acquiescing in an amateur practice, she contributed to redefining the category 'woman artist' within certain boundaries – as did in fact Bodichon with her own practice as described by Blackwell (narrative relationality).

Having discussed her artistic self-conception, in the following section I examine another significant aspect in Bodichon's life: philanthropy.

7.3 Bodichon's Philanthropic Projects

Besides her artistic prospects, philanthropy was another sphere of action Bodichon sought to explore from an early age. As Frank Prochaska has shown, English women (most notably within the middle- and upper-middle class) committed themselves to charity activities increasingly in the nineteenth century. Culturally precluded from earning a living (at least among those who considered themselves 'ladies'), philanthropy became 'the leisured woman's most obvious outlet for self-expression'.³⁰ Voluntary work 'was relatively free from the restraints and prejudices associated with women in paid employments'.³¹ Social commentators and authors of literature for girls encouraged and justified women's involvement in active benevolence on the grounds that their female nature – their modesty, humbleness, sensitivity, compassion and self-sacrifice – made them particularly suited to care for the suffering sick and the distressed poor. Debarred from the social recognition that work for profit brought about,

²⁹ Other letters provide additional evidence for these amateur aspects of her practice: Elizabeth Blackwell to Emily Blackwell, 13 Surrey Villas, December 1874, Schlesinger, Box 3 Folder 46; Elizabeth Blackwell to Emily Blackwell, Hastings, 28 June 1878, Schlesinger, Box 3 Folder 47; Parkes to Bodichon, Leam, 15 April 1852, GCPP Parkes 5/62; Howitt to Bodichon, [September 1859], Beaky, letter 34; Alice Bonham-Carter to Girton College Executive Committee, quoted in Hirsch, P. (1998) p.353.

³⁰ Prochaska, F.K. (1980) *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press) p.5.

³¹ Prochaska, F.K. (1980) p.6.

leisured women could become agents of moral authority and social improvement through philanthropy.³² Leisured women reappropriated good work as ‘their rightful mission’³³ and it could be as much of an entertainment activity, a celebration of property and an instrument of social control as of heartfelt duty and effective aid.³⁴ As Prochaska states, ‘By enlarging the scope of women’s activities, they [nineteenth-century female philanthropists] also modified the way in which people interpreted the possibilities inherent in the female character’.³⁵ Thus, by the time Bodichon contemplated the possibility of joining the philanthropic cause she was drawing on an already established tradition, practiced by the female members of her family.

In her early twenties Bodichon confided to Parkes:

My dear friend I have nothing to say particular but I feel a mass of ideas & thoughts in my head & long for some expression, some letting out of, the restless spirit, in work for those who are ignorant. I feel quite oppressed sometimes with so much enjoyment of intellect (for I was all day yesterday seeing painting & pictures) & so I have been ever since I came up, I love & take keen delight in all this intellectual world but I feel still as if I have no right to enjoy so much while there is so much ignorance in the world & so many eyes shut up.

Oh! When one really knows & understands a little of the misery in the world & its ignorance, is it not wicked to sit still & look at it? Ought one not to go out & help to fight it, even if ever so humbly. This is what is ever ringing in my head sometime loud & sometime soft but it is always there. But what is the use of talking. I am always thinking & talking never acting.³⁶

This excerpt is an early testimony to Bodichon’s unfolding philanthropic becoming – her struggle for self-determining action, here as a social reformer. Her epistolary narrative stands for an early negotiation of her wish to act in a self-determining way – conforming to her developing sense of being (programmatic self-direction). It represents an early dialogical articulation of her urge to engage in benevolence. In Humboldt’s terms, this narrative would stand for the required process of knowing one’s self in one’s education: ‘In order for an individual to extend and individuate his character (and this is what all character building comes

³² Prochaska, F.K. (1980) pp.7-8.

³³ Ibid, p.11.

³⁴ Ibid, pp.40-41, pp.58-60, pp.74-75, p.93, pp.102-103, pp.115-116, pp.124-125, pp.135-136, and pp.155-158.

³⁵ Ibid, p.2.

³⁶ Bodichon to Parkes, [1847?], GCPP Parkes 5/168.

down to), he must first know himself, in the fullest sense of the world'.³⁷

Accordingly, Bodichon's narrative represents the process of knowing one's self before putting one's individuated self into action.

In her articulation of her wish to engage in charity work, Bodichon draws on a series of permeating discourses, which she incorporates into her sense of self to forge the discursive positioning she takes up in this epistolary narrative. This articulation of her struggle for autonomy is favoured by certain features of the genre. As a site of (self-)reflection and self-expression, letters, like diary-writing, permitted Bodichon to verbalize and put order to the 'mass of ideas & thoughts' that ring 'sometime loud & sometime soft' in her head. Unlike diary-writing though, she did so in dialogue with her best friend. Her close relationship with Parkes provided Bodichon with a favourable environment to confide her state of 'restless spirit'. As she explains to Parkes, 'I love & take keen delight in all this intellectual world' – e.g. 'seeing painting & pictures' (self-discovery). In *Bildung's* terms, Bodichon enjoys undergoing self-cultivation in the form of embarking on sketching expeditions, visiting exhibitions and indulging in thought-provoking reading, and stimulating socialization (as discussed in chapter 5). She is able to do so thanks to her privileged social position and to the encouragement she received from her family. However, Bodichon feels 'quite oppressed sometimes with so much enjoyment of intellect'. For she feels she does not have the 'right to enjoy so much while there is so much ignorance in the world & so many eyes shut up'. Rejecting 'ladylike idleness', she 'long[s] for some expression, some letting out of' this 'restless spirit' that seizes her (self-definition). The outlet takes the form of philanthropic commitment (programmatic self-direction).

In February 1847 Bodichon and Parkes discussed by letter and en tête-à-tête Bacon's *Advancement of Learning*. As Hirsch underlines:

Bacon was much invoked by Unitarian philosophers such as Joseph Priestley because he represented knowledge as power, but the power was to be acquired in order to serve the community, thus rendering the scientist the paradigm of the "good citizen and [a] useful member of society".³⁸

³⁷ Humboldt, W. von (1796-1797) 'The Eighteenth Century', p.15f, in Cowan, M. (ed.) (1963) pp.125-126.

³⁸ Kramnick, I. (1986) 'Eighteenth-Century Science and Radical Social Theory', *Journal of British Studies*, 25 pp.1-30 (p.8), quoted in Hirsch, P. (1998) p.34.

That being so, Hirsch's implicit suggestion is that Bacon's work contributed to instilling in Bodichon a belief in citizens' power to improve society by dint of social reform and philanthropy. Following Hirsch's line of thought, Bodichon's epistolary narrative could be interpreted as her wish to extend her own right to develop her self-cultivation to those who are 'ignorant' – those who are not guided towards *Bildung*. Resonating with *Bildung*'s idea of improving the world through individuals' self-cultivation, Bodichon's desire would seem to be to expand this personal growth to 'the ignorant'. As Humboldt wrote:

To form and educate and organize human beings is not only a task meant for teachers, religious advisors, and lawgivers. As man always remains a human being in addition to everything else he may become, he always has the duty, no matter what business he may engage in, to take practical consideration of his own and others' intellectual and moral education.³⁹

Alternatively, reading epistolary narratives as discursive positioning, the above excerpt can be interpreted as Bodichon endorsing the slightly condescending 'assistance to the needy' approach adopted by most contemporary charitable institutions. Indeed, in his essay 'The Eighteenth Century', Humboldt insists on individuals achieving a balance between operating in our narrow sphere and being citizens of the world as a way of collectively enhancing humanity:

We cannot exclude from the demands that reason makes on us the adaptation of our activities to the whole of humanity, to be not merely citizens of our state and our time but also to be citizens of the world. ... we demand no more of man than that he regard mankind as a whole, and himself as a part of it, with the help of his spirit; that he espy its broad course with the help of his thoughts; and for the rest that he keep walking on his own narrow footpath, in modesty as before, but with firmer steps and greater understanding of where and how his steps are going.⁴⁰

Bodichon's wish to improve the condition of the less fortunate evokes Humboldt's idea of individuals acting bearing in mind their place in the world. At the same time, resonating with the kind of partial self-alienation I have argued so far, Bodichon's 'greater understanding' of how should she proceed to fight against 'ignorance' can take the form of a slightly condescending approach. In the

³⁹ Humboldt, W. von (1795) 'Plan for a Comparative Anthropology', p.380f, in Cowan, M. (ed.) (1963) p.125.

⁴⁰ Humboldt, W. von (1796-1997) 'The Eighteenth Century', pp.12-13, Ibid, p.68.

previous letter I pointed out how Bodichon approved of two women enlightening the ‘utter moral darkness’ in which Edinburgh people living ‘in the worst part’ of the city stand. Here too, Bodichon seeks to open the eyes of those who live in ignorance. Drawing on the philanthropic discursive regime of the well-intended and humble aid towards the hapless destitute, Bodichon regrets ‘the misery in the world & its ignorance’. Distancing from ‘those who are ignorant’ and positioning herself in a privileged position in relation to them, Bodichon is determined to ‘work for’ those less fortunate than her. She even seems ready to ‘fight’, i.e. eradicate, their misery and ignorance. Yet, the subject position she constructs in this letter is underpinned by an exclusionary standpoint that turns her claim to her own right to *Bildung* into a privilege granted to some social categories only. Indeed, as the previous example illustrated, Bodichon’s situatedness takes for granted middle-class superiority vis-à-vis the lower ranks. She shared this philanthropic outlook with many of her social counterparts. In her publications, she intertwined it with a call for the professionalization of philanthropy, including the possibility of women being paid for their social work. However, as this letter excerpt suggests, like her co-workers, Bodichon’s philanthropic approach is imbued with class tensions.

Bodichon’s epistolary narrative stands for an early testimony to her becoming a philanthropist. Taking for granted her right to self-cultivation, she regrets the ignorance in which the lower ranks live and she expresses her wish to fight misery. Individuating her sense of self within norms of cultural intelligibility, Bodichon’s epistolary “I” takes up a positioning within an intersectionality of discursive traditions. Her developing feminist consciousness fuels the self-image she projects as a young woman enjoying self-cultivation – challenging thus male-dominated notions of *Bildung* (as I discuss further in chapter 8). Simultaneously, she disregards prescriptive notions of ‘ladylike idleness’ and contributes to current discourses on middle-class superiority. As in the case of the first excerpt quoted in Section 7.2., this epistolary narrative can be interpreted as a consideration (her wish to get involved in voluntary work) Bodichon shared with her friend as part of her unfolding philanthropic becoming. This letter offers a snapshot of her process of self-fashioning as a social reformer – her struggle to act in a self-determining way (programmatic self-direction).

We do not have Parkes' reply but, judging from a letter she sent to her Birmingham friend Kate Jevons around that time (1847), we can suggest that Parkes approved and nurtured the self-image Bodichon projected in her letter:

I believe no one is really happy without some steadfast aim; it is very difficult for a woman to find this, but I think it may be done. I know one young person whose natural talent for drawing has been highly cultivated, and her wish is eventually to become an artist, and that I sincerely hope she will be, anyhow she will be an indefatigably benevolent woman. I have great difficulty in getting an object; I often wish I could do more among the poor people in London, but they live in such horrible neighbourhoods that my Mother is naturally afraid of my going. Sometimes I wish to write eventually, but novels and annual poetry are the staple feminine line of the present day and I have no ambition for either.⁴¹

Evocative of the simultaneous *Bildung* of Bodichon's female correspondents previously noted, Parkes' epistolary narrative somehow mirrors Bodichon's letter. She claims her right to 'work' while she recognises her difficulties in focusing on a particular endeavour. Like Bodichon, Parkes challenges the bourgeois ideal of domesticity by including women in her belief that 'no one is really happy without some steadfast aim', which, like in Bodichon's narrative, can be interpreted as an (un)paid purposeful work. Parkes claims her and women's right to be 'happy' with a 'steadfast aim'. Though she recognises that 'it is very difficult for a woman' to do so, which can be interpreted as a hint of feminist consciousness. In Parkes' narrative the example she uses to illustrate her claim for her and women's right to 'work' is, not two Edinburgh women, but Bodichon herself: eventually 'an artist' and a future 'benevolent woman'. That is, if in Bodichon's narrative her example of the two Edinburgh women served to stir in Parkes, and by extension in herself, personal self-fulfilment, in her narrative Parkes takes Bodichon's aspirations and achievements to justify her own expectations and maybe also to excite in Jevons a similar calling. In this sense, Bodichon stands for the 'inspiring example' that Humboldt suggests interaction with others brings about (see section 6.2. footnote 20). Parkes' tone when referring to Bodichon's projects suggests that she did nurture her friend's talent and supported her ambitions – the kind of 'response' and 'affirmation' that Humboldt highlights in the aforementioned quote. Like Bodichon, speaking from a bourgeois standpoint, Parkes also considers

⁴¹ Parkes to Jevons, Hastings, 24 January 1847, GCPP Parkes 6/50.

philanthropy – offering aid to ‘horrible neighbourhoods’ – as an appropriate outlet for a woman. Like Bodichon above, in this letter to Jevons Parkes works out her right to act in accordance with her self by means of reappropriated discourses.

Also evocative of the reciprocal nature of *Bildung*, a similar correlation between work and happiness is projected in a letter Howitt addressed to Bodichon dated probably 1851. At the time of writing she had been studying painting in Munich with Kaulbach for a year. Overjoyed with feelings of self-fulfilment, she wrote ecstatically to Bodichon:

Darling Barbara, if I were to die now I should have tasted of all that is really selfish enjoyment in life – the intense joy of being beloved by ones [sic] own family, of loving them, the intense rapture of friendship and love [she was engaged]– the passion in its purest form – and of Art-extasy and Nature- extasy! – what more can I desire? Only one more extasy remains – that is to do good in the world – to help, to console, to fill others with noble aspiration! – That is the unselfish delight I long for – the means I believe will be given me – if not thro’ painting – my burning desire! – in some other way!⁴²

In her epistolary narrative Howitt expresses the ‘intense joy’ she finds in giving and receiving love and in devoting her time to her ‘burning desire’ – painting. In doing so, like Bodichon and Parkes, she reappropriates the notion of bourgeois femininity. Yet, she does so with a slight feeling of ‘guilt’ that reminds of the selfless attitude bourgeois women were expected to adopt: to nurture others’ needs, leaving aside their own wishes. In this sense, Howitt’s narrative contrasts with Bodichon’s more upfront self-projection above. Like Bodichon and Parkes, moving towards gender normativity, Howitt contemplates the possibility of dedicating her time to the culturally sanctioned ‘feminine’ activity of helping others – doing ‘good in the world’.

The interactive feedback with endless new beginnings extended along a chain of letters, not only between Bodichon, Parkes and Howitt but also between Bodichon and the many other close friends to whom Bodichon confided her thoughts – like Marian Evans, the Blackwell sisters, Anna Jameson and William Allingham. This multisource feedback fuelled Bodichon’s articulation of her self-determining action – a pattern she followed throughout her life. For, as noted

⁴² Howitt to Bodichon, 57 Amalien Strasse, [Munich], 10 February [1851], Beaky, letter 14.

earlier, Meyers highlights that life plans are constantly evolving and subject to revision. They are always unfolding.

As discussed in chapter 4, Bodichon established an infant school in London in 1854 – Portman Hall School. After nine years, in 1863 she closed it because her chief mistress, Ellen Allen, was to get married and, unable to find another competent teacher, she decided to give up the project. Though not fully disconnecting from her philanthropic and feminist engagements, Bodichon focused on her artistic activities: in November 1864 she moved to Paris for a year to train under the tutelage of Camille Corot. The following letter excerpt is an example of Bodichon's philanthropic unfolding in a circumstance of episodic self-direction: how she revised her life plan and redefined her stance after nine years running her school. Asserting her voice as a philanthropist, in August 1863 she wrote to Allingham:

You know Ellen A[llen] I think; the mistress of our school [Portman Hall] – well! she it is who is going to be married, and as she has been eight years working with me I must see her safely into her new life: this marriage is what the world calls good because she, a penniless lass, marries a man with £2,000 a year: for me, I hope it will be good, but he is a Roman Catholic and very *dévo*t; and already bullies her, and calls her a pagan! Because she is about where you are in belief. This marriage is a great up-rooting of one of my interests in life because it has made me give up the school; I know no one I can trust to carry it on and so it is wiser to stop. It is the individual that makes the work and I have no faith in Schools, institutions, &c., unless there is a soul in them. It is absurd of people to say they will do good and establish this and that, the great thing is to find a good worker with good head, good heart, and sound health, and then just be contented to help them to do what they best can without any fixed plans of your own which only shackles the real worker.⁴³

In the first two examples in sections 7.2. and 7.3., Bodichon shared with Parkes her projected intentions before putting her thoughts into action. Instead, this letter excerpt is written with the purpose of justifying a decision she had already taken. In this letter she shares with her friend Allingham the reasons why she made up her mind to close her school. In stating her motives, she projects an articulation of how she struggled for autonomy: how she arrived at the conclusion that she wanted to close the school – that is, how she negotiated acting in accordance with her confident evolving sense of self (self-discovery and self-

⁴³ Bodichon to William Allingham, 2 August 1863, 5 Blandford Square, N.W., Allingham, H. and Williams, E.B. (eds) (1911) pp.80-81.

definition). She does so by mobilising the narrative of the ‘good’ marriage (‘a penniless lass, marries a man with £2,000 a year’) and by drawing on Anti-Catholicism. Putting into question the future of Ellen Allen’s marriage by making reference to the religious background of her husband (‘he is a Roman Catholic and very *dévo*t; and already bullies her’), Bodichon contributed to arousing prejudices against Catholicism.

In justifying her decision, Bodichon verbalizes her views on how a successful charitable institution is to be run: by finding ‘a good worker with good head, good heart, and sound health’ and by encouraging her ‘soul’ ‘without any fixed plans of your own’ so as not to shackle ‘the real worker’. Challenging prevailing notions of ‘female modesty’, this assertive self-projection is testimony to her self-image as an authority in philanthropic matters. Bodichon’s epistolary narrative reflects her critical engagement with dominant approaches to philanthropy and with the institution of marriage – a question I discuss in the following section. We do not have Allingham’s response but, following the letter-exchange convention of reciprocity, he may have well offered Bodichon his opinion and encouragement. All in all, this letter excerpt stands for an example of how Bodichon projected an articulation of how she renegotiated in her letters her self-determination as an educationist in line with life contingencies and her evolving self-conception, here as a social reformer.

I conclude this section by discussing a last letter excerpt, which offers another snapshot of Bodichon’s philanthropic becoming. This last example serves as a clear illustration of the partial self-alienation Bodichon underwent as effected by travelling (see chapter 6) and of her exercise of autonomy at the expense of certain social categories. As part of her interest in social reform, during her voyages Bodichon combined cultural sightseeing with philanthropic ‘touring’, visiting prisons, refuges for destitute girls, hospices, and schools. As a renowned philanthropist, in her travel letters Bodichon invariably projected herself as a referent in social reform. As the following epistolary narrative shows, she did so at the intersection of her feminist assertion of her authorial power, a feminist claim for women’s role as social reformers, and a critical yet acquiescent philanthropic approach that in Foucauldian terms would be interpreted as a *dispositif de pouvoir*.

During her 1866 trip across France and Spain, Bodichon visited the industrial village of Mettray, near Tours. Reporting her visit, she wrote to Evans:

You know that the Colonie of Mettray is a reformatory industrial village founded by 2 rich gentlemen one an officer & the other a magistrate at Paris M Demetz [Frédéric Auguste Demetz, the founder] is left now alone an old man 71. In the village [there] are 10 houses & in each a family of boys 600 in all nearly all of them have been condemned to some sentence. 3000 have passed thro' [unreadable] hands & nearly all have been changed from animals into useful citizens. His [is] by far the most remarkable establishment I ever saw in any country & well worth every one while to see it. La force, la famille, et la discipline militaire, are Mr. Demetz's favourite words. He has as well established a mansion maternelle a sort of school for bad rich boys – there were 19 there all in separate rooms like cells each with a tutor. Mr. Demetz was enthusiastic about the good this school had done & wishes to come to England to start one. ... I doubt whether our boys particularly bad ones would consent to be locked up & treated like convicts. ... the discipline is military & this perfect order these ranks & signs & the cheerful sound of the military music which calls the boys to work & to meals must be excellent medicine to poor children from disorderly homes where nothing regular straight & active was valued. Indeed I myself felt as I have often done how many of our lives even we who are not young criminals would be the better for the help of such inspiriting discipline. ... There are omissions in Mettray but what a difficulty even to make any thing so perfect as it is! So I hardly like to mention them ... there are no women in his families – and it is not absurd to call anything a family with no woman in it. I felt the want of some good motherly women for each of the homes. These poor low natured children with bad brains & poor health wanted tender comfortable women, I saw one boy cry because he was scolded for having said some bad word & I felt a woman would have known best how to take advantage of that soft mood. The teacher was kind but it was a military sort of kindness & the boy was too little to be treated as if he had been only a number & not a child.⁴⁴

In her epistolary narrative Bodichon works out her outlook as a social reformer. As a philanthropist, she distances herself from the 'young criminals' living in the *colonie* and she identifies herself to a certain extent with the '2 rich gentlemen' that manage the institution. She concludes that it is 'by far the most remarkable establishment I ever saw in any country & well worth every one while to see it'. As mentioned in chapter 3, *Bildung* implies fostering the inner development of individuals in view of enhancing humanity. Humboldt deplored the Prussian educational scheme, which, in his view, was aimed at turning individuals into citizens and thus had the effect of hampering their spontaneity.

⁴⁴ Bodichon to Evans, France and Spain, [November - 16 December] 1866, Yale University, Beinecke Library, George Eliot and George Lewes Collection, Box 7.

According to him, 'the positive social welfare ... produces monotony, uniformity, and alienates people's actions from their own character'.⁴⁵ Humboldt appealed to the Greek states, where, in his view, unlike Prussia, individuals acted as desirable citizens because they were encouraged to develop their inner energies. Like *Bildung*, Bodichon seems to aim too at the improvement of society – here by addressing the 'problem' of men who 'have been condemned to some sentence'. However, her epistolary narrative evokes the dominant 'punishment and discipline' approach to many philanthropic institutions. Reminiscent of the 'poor fellow creatures' and 'miserable people' aforementioned, Bodichon refers to the objects of Demetz' social reform as 'poor children from disorderly homes where nothing regular straight & active was valued'. Bodichon seems to acquiesce with the *colonie's* 'inspiring' military discipline by describing this practice as 'excellent medicine' – a remedy that will cure 'poor low natured children with bad brains & poor health' of their wanting natures. 'La force, la famille, et la discipline militaire' are believed to turn 'animals into useful citizens'. Useful citizens are the ultimate goal of *Bildung*. Yet, this understanding of citizens is underpinned by power relations that are left unchallenged.⁴⁶

Bodichon seems to have some reservations about the *colonie*. Mobilizing the pervasive discourse on the care-taking nature of womanhood, she considers that some 'tender comfortable' and 'good motherly women for each of the homes' would make the institution a proper 'family'. She also seems to subtly criticise the *colonie*. For she inadvertently describes it as an institution where young men are 'locked up & treated like convicts', as if they were 'only a number'. But despite these 'omissions' and presumably unwitting criticism, Bodichon ultimately seems to sanction the institution's scheme ('any thing so perfect as it is'). All in all, Bodichon's epistolary narrative attests to her process of individuating her outlook – here as a social reformer.

The above excerpt illustrates Bodichon's partial self-alienation as effected by travelling. Getting to know other social reform schemes seems to confirm rather than interrogate her beliefs. This partial self-alienation was illustrated in Bodichon's travel letter from Algeria, where contact with native Algerian women,

⁴⁵ Humboldt, W. von (1792) 'An Attempt to Define the Legal Limits of Government', pp.111-129, in Cowan, M. (ed.) (1963) p.41.

⁴⁶ For a Foucauldian analysis of Mettray see, Ramsland, J. (1999) 'Mettray, Delinquent Youth and the Cult of Religious Honour', in *Paedagogica Historica*, Supplementary Series Volume V, pp.231-240.

reaffirmed her feminist consciousness by reformulating her stance from an exclusionary point of view. Likewise, in her epistolary self-projection, Bodichon claims her right as a woman to engage in philanthropy and have a voice as an expert. As highlighted at the beginning of the section, philanthropy could become a source of empowerment for women as agents of moral authority and social improvement. But in her claim to self-fulfilment through philanthropy, Bodichon excluded certain social categories.

As the examples in this section illustrate, Bodichon projected herself as a committed social reformer. Her epistolary narratives stand for her struggle to act as a self-determining agent. Like with her artistic endeavours, Bodichon's philanthropic activities were reviewed in the press. Reading newspapers for their content, Bodichon can be said to be referred to as a renowned philanthropist and women's rights campaigner. As noted in the previous section, not all articles were unanimously complimentary, but Bodichon was reviewed as 'a lady well known as a philanthropist, an artist, and a writer on social and political subjects'.⁴⁷ Her 'efforts to improve and encourage female emigration' were reported in the local press.⁴⁸ Her paper 'On the Extension of the Suffrage of Women', read at the Social Science Association annual congress, held in Manchester in 1866, was deemed 'well reasoned and moderate', which, 'as a speaker said with that clumsy patronage which belongs to men in speaking of the intellectual efforts of women, it would have done credit to any men' and received 'far from inconsiderable' 'sympathy'.⁴⁹ In this sense, Bodichon's philanthropic self-image seems to emerge less ambiguous than her professional/amateur artistic self-conception.

In the last section of this chapter I discuss Bodichon's epistolary negotiation of her self-fulfilment as a married woman. Because of the fragmented nature of her *epistolarium*, I deploy the notion of narrative relationality to illustrate the workings of epistolary reasoning prior to her marriage.

⁴⁷ [Anonymous] (1867) [Untitled], *The Ipswich Journal*, Saturday 19 October, Issue 6703, p.5.

⁴⁸ [Anonymous] (1866) [Untitled], *The New Castle Courant*, Friday 15 June, Issue 9990, [unknown page]; [Anonymous] (1866) 'The Ladies Column', *Manchester Times*, Saturday 16 June, [unknown issue], [unknown page].

⁴⁹ [Anonymous] (1866) 'The Social Science Association', *Daily News*, Thursday, 11 October, Issue 6376, [unknown page]. For the Glasgow Herald the paper was only 'a tolerably well-written paper', [Anonymous], (1866) [Untitled], *Glasgow Herald*, Tuesday 16 October, Issue 8355, [unknown page].

7.4 Bodichon on Marriage

In order to achieve the self-fulfilling lifestyle she envisaged in her letters – in order to act in agreement with her self-conception – Bodichon negotiated a revised understanding of gendered beliefs on love and marriage. For the cultural expectations of a woman's duties as wife and mother stood in tension with the type of self-satisfying projects she articulated dialogically in her personal correspondence. Expressed and publicized in medical texts, advice books, women's magazines, sermons and social criticism, bourgeois domesticity required the sacrifice of women's selfhood. It emphasized their distinct female nature – attentive, intuitive, gentle, patient, tactful, self-sacrificing – to justify their domestic and maternal duties. This sexual differentiation ran to the detriment of their own interests and talents. For women, whether married or not, were expected to provide the favourable domestic environment to assist and nurture the interests, ambitions and wishes of the male members of the household – a view famously developed by John Ruskin in his *Sesame and Lilies* (1865).⁵⁰

In line with Dena Goodman's notion of 'epistolary reasoning', whereby women exchanged considerations over marriage and weighed marriage proposals to a trusted friend or relative in their letters,⁵¹ Bodichon and her friends used personal correspondence to ponder over a suitable compromise between marriage expectations and professional ambitions that was respectful of their individual needs. In *Bildung's* terms, epistolary dialogues served as forums where they negotiated their autonomy as single, married and widowed women. As such, letter-writing created a space where they articulated their own redefined discourses on marriage and womanhood.

As discussed in chapter 5, Tennyson's poem 'The Princess' (1847) and John Stuart Mill's *Principles of Political Economy* (1848) put into motion an epistolary intellectual conversation between Bodichon, Parkes and Howitt that triggered a discussion on love and marriage. Apart from these examples, there are hardly any allusions to questions of love and marriage in Bodichon's epistolary narratives prior to her marriage. Bearing in mind the fragmented nature of her *epistolarium*, there may have been more references in letters now lost. According to the extant

⁵⁰ Ruskin, J. (1865) *Sesame and Lilies* (London: [unknown]).

⁵¹ Goodman, D. (2009) p.277.

correspondence, it is not until relatively late that Bodichon and her friends started to discuss love affairs in their letters. Busy as they were with reading, attending public lectures, museums and concerts, visiting each other, publishing essays in local newspapers and travelling, the last thing their letters illustrate were thoughts of marriage. Traditional marital duties would have put these self-satisfying activities to a halt. Furthermore, as Bodichon knew from studying the legal system of common law as affecting women (synthesized in *Brief Summary*, 1854), marriage also involved a substantial loss of legal freedom – an amount of independence that, as I will show, they were not willing to give up. Though later than one would have expected, Bodichon and her friends did use letter-exchange to express and share their thoughts about men and marriage throughout the different phases of their lives.

Bodichon received several marriage proposals. Her first suitor was her tutor Philip Kingsford. Also in 1849 she received a marriage proposal from James Joseph Sylvester, a professor of natural philosophy and astronomy at London University.⁵² One year later, Joseph Neuberg, a businessman from Nottingham, showed special attention to her too.⁵³ Bodichon turned these marriage proposals down. The man that seems to have first caught her attention was John Chapman, the editor of the *Westminster Review* and a well-known liberal publisher. She had known him for some years and by summer 1855, they projected to enter a free union, seemingly aborted by her father some weeks after.⁵⁴ It is not until she reached the age of 30 that Bodichon eventually married Dr Eugène Bodichon, in 1857. Putting into play the concept of narrative relationality, in this section I examine the exercise of epistolary reasoning first, through Parkes' letters and, after Bodichon's marriage, through Bodichon's own epistolary narratives.

On 24 November 1849 Parkes – aged twenty – received a letter of marriage proposal from Robert Fane, a Scottish young man. The following day and without consulting her parents Parkes replied to Fane:

Dear Sir,
Your plain & straightforward letter deserves a plain & straightforward answer & such I feel sure you would rather receive than one conventionally framed – In asking me to marry you pay me the

⁵² James Sylvester to Bodichon, 21 November 1854, London Metropolitan University, Women's Library, Papers of Barbara McCrimmon related to Barbara Bodichon, 7BMC/C/01.

⁵³ Hirsch, P. (1998) p.105.

⁵⁴ Ibid, pp.106-114.

greatest compliment a man can pay to a woman – and the impossibility of my complying with your wishes does not prevent me from feeling it as such –

Sir, in the existing state of society a woman must in a great degree allow herself to become absorbed in the life & plans of husband – What long & deep knowledge she ought to have of him; & what an intense confidence she ought to feel that his aims are such that she can consciously devote herself to him & to them – She should be his hearty co-operator not merely through her love but thro' her conscience & her intellect –

Beyond your fair character in the world & the attainments I myself believe you to possess I know nothing whatever of you; & I think it more than probable that in a young girl of twenty you would find a thousand deficiencies you are not now aware of –

Believe me I have more need of a teacher than a husband & I hope you will continue the friend I hoped to find you.

I remain, dear Sir,

Yours

Bessie Rayner Parkes⁵⁵

The same day Parkes sent a letter to her father informing him of the situation and the decision she had taken on her own:

My Mother will fully inform you in the particulars of the abound fact that yesterday afternoon as I was sitting composedly stitching away at a flannel petticoat, I received an offer of Mr Robert Fane's hand and heart. I roared with laughter inasmuch that my Mother thought I was going into hysterics. In my whole life I never heard of anything so silly; ... I subscribe myself my dearest Daddy what I long hope to remain, being very well satisfied with my present way of life, with Mill, Latin, horse, reviews, Macaulay, poetry, drawing, the Exhibitions, Polytechnic, Hastings, Birmingham, London & Leam, & all the beauty & general jolliness of existence. .⁵⁶

In her letters to Fane and her father, Parkes articulates her wish to act in accordance with her sense of self (episodic self-direction). Enjoying her lifestyle as a single young woman and believing that a man and a woman need to know each other in depth before entering marriage, in her letters she puts forward why she turns down the marriage proposal. Parkes' letter to Fane is a 'plain & straightforward' but polite answer. She cordially but firmly explains that, despite acknowledging she feels complimented and despite being persuaded of his 'fair character ... & the attainments', she cannot comply with his wishes. Parkes' civility is translated into a roar of laughter at such a 'silly' proposal in her letter to her

⁵⁵ Parkes to Robert Fane, 25 November 1849, GCPP Parkes 9/109.

⁵⁶ Parkes to Joseph Parkes, Hastings, 25 November 1849, GCPP Parkes 2/34.

father. Parkes, and we can imagine Bodichon too, were perfectly content enjoying the *Bildung*-like activities that stimulated their self-cultivation. Parkes' closing words in her formal letter to Fane ('Believe me I have more need of a teacher than a husband') reflect her priorities (and probably Bodichon's too): intellectual and artistic self-realization rather than marriage duties. In her letter to her father, her self-realization is expressed in plainer words ('very well satisfied with my present way of life...'). Parkes had been writing her poems since 1847. She published some in local newspapers and succeeded in publishing an anthology in 1852. Bodichon had been publishing her first newspaper articles in the *Hastings and St Leonards News* in defence of sanitation, free access to private forests and women's education and comfortable dress. As Bodichon's first letter excerpt (Section 7.2.) illustrates, the two friends envisaged a rewarding artistic career – at this point, unbothered by marital duties.

The feminist consciousness that seems to underpin Parkes' subject position is ambiguously expressed in her letter to Fane. Her epistolary narrative is situated between gender normativity ('a woman must in a great degree allow herself to become absorbed in the life & plans of husband', 'she can consciously devote herself to him & to them – She should be his hearty co-operator not merely through her love but thro' her conscience & her intellect') and a statement that can be interpreted as either describing or criticising the present conditions ('in the existing state of society'). This ambiguity is resolved in a letter she wrote to Bodichon some months after: 'My dear Friend I wonder if you will ever have to pull me thro' love affairs. Does not the mere notion sound eminently ridiculous. ... our ideas of love & marriage are so particularly different to the current ones'.⁵⁷ Reminiscent of the kind of confident attitude with which she explained to Bella and Nanny Leigh Smith her encounter with a German young man, in her letter to Bodichon Parkes gives priority to her self-determination over social demands. All in all, Parkes' letters to Fane, her father and Bodichon stand for her articulation of her episodic self-direction. In them she takes up an individuated subject position that incorporates her feminist stance on a (married) woman's right to self-fulfilment (her 'particularly different' ideas on 'love & marriage') into her ambiguous acceptance of certain traditional gender expectations.

⁵⁷ Parkes to Bodichon, 23 April 1850, GCPP Parkes 5/46.

One year later, in 1850 Parkes entered into a friendship correspondence with her distant cousin Sam Blackwell – a Dudley ironmaster and widower. She had recently renewed acquaintance with him and their letters soon became a courtship correspondence. They kept a marriage engagement that lasted almost ten years, which included several breaking offs. Similar to the Fane affair, during her engagement years Parkes used personal correspondence (to Blackwell, to her parents and to her closest friends) to negotiate her self-determination.

At the end of July 1854 Bodichon and Parkes rented a cottage in Maentwrog, near Port Madoc, North Wales, for a working holiday. At Maentwrog Bodichon edited her *Brief Summary* and Parkes her essays *Remarks on the Education of Girls*.⁵⁸ On 28 July Parkes wrote to Blackwell:

in all these years we have scarcely since 1847 been alone together, so as to gain that confidential knowledge of the intricacies of character which occurs with friends of the same sex. Nor have you seen me among my personal friends where I am quite free to speak & act. My great habit of independence in life & in action has for years been so different to that of most women as to render me diffident abstractedly of forming the happiness of another & of myself in the marriage state. I have felt that the keen interest I take in politics & social literature & more especially in all concerning the legal & social position of my own sex, is such as men rarely heartily like in a woman, & This has kept me up to five & twenty peculiarly aloof from most. That I am now I should essentially continue to be; ... my opinions are not pliant, & I have entered on a literary career which is to me the working aim of life. I am writing as honestly as you wrote; & if you who once knew much happiness in marriage think me unreasonable in my misgiving on the general subject, it is because you perhaps do not know how much cultivated women are beginning to tremble in contemplating marriage as it now is.⁵⁹

Taking up a straightforward subject position strongly imbued with feminist insights, in her epistolary narrative Parkes expressed to Blackwell that she expected from marriage mutual love as well as intellectual and temperamental congeniality. In order to get to know the person she was to marry fully, she asked for a long courtship. But, as she stated also in other letters, she deplored the lack of free intercourse she was granted to get to know her suitor to a sufficient and intimate extent.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Hirsch, P. (1998) p.99. Parkes published her poems *Summer Sketches and Other Poems* in spring 1854, Parkes, B. (1854) *Summer Sketches and Other Poems* (London: [unknown]).

⁵⁹ Parkes to Sam Blackwell, Maentwrog, 28 July 1854, GCPP Parkes 9/6.

⁶⁰ Parkes to Jevons, n.d., GCPP Parkes 6/62; Parkes to Bodichon, [1849], GCPP Parkes 5/36.

During 1854 Bodichon had been collecting her summary of laws affecting women, which she was now editing and finally published in autumn of that year. Most probably she discussed with Parkes the amount of legal freedom women lost when they entered marriage. As she succinctly wrote in *Brief Summary*: 'A single woman has the same rights to property, to protection from the law, and has to pay the same taxes to the State, as a man'. However, in entering marriage, 'A man and wife are one person in law; the wife loses all her rights as a single woman, and her existence is entirely absorbed in that of her husband'.⁶¹ Fully aware of the potential risks that becoming a wife entailed, Parkes explained to Blackwell how she identified herself with those 'cultivated women' who, aware of the legal system of common law, made them reluctant to enter into marriage.

To make sure that a true congeniality existed between them and so as to avoid artificial and uncomfortable meetings in family gatherings, Parkes asked Blackwell to meet in London. She suggested meeting there, among her friends, so that he had a clearer idea of her character and lifestyle before any engagement was agreed. As she had previously explained to Fane, Parkes was ready to assume her role as companion to her husband. But she understood her role as one that would provide her simultaneous fulfilment of her own interests. She expected of her future husband the same respect towards her needs that she was ready to pay to his, including respect for the 'literary career' which was to her 'the working aim of life' – a position that mirrors Bodichon's household arrangements as described in her letters to her family during her American honeymoon (see sections 6.2. and below).

We do not have Blackwell's letters but judging from Parkes' epistolary narratives (narrative relationality), it seems that, at least in theory, he approved of her 'young unladylike boldness'. On 28 September Parkes wrote to him:

I am deeply glad that you should approve of my "young unladylike boldness". Indeed there is very little of the young lady in me; & I do not love the word, & always call myself a woman; I have very little affinity to most ladies. ... If I married you I should trust my whole life in your hands; ... I have so much to lose; so much that a man might

⁶¹ Barbara Bodichon (1854) *A Brief Summary, in Plain Language, of the Most Important Laws Concerning Women*, reprinted in Lacey, C.A. (ed.) (2001) *Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon and the Langham Place Group* (London: Routledge) p.23 and p.25 respectively.

destroy – So many aims & interests & friends & hopes, for which no passion could make amends⁶²

Parkes' 'unclear' relationship with Blackwell was the object of comments among their society.⁶³ In order to avoid this gossip, Elizabeth Parkes wished an engagement to be agreed before her daughter entered the type of free relationship she demanded.⁶⁴ Parkes' epistolary reasoning in her letter to her mother reveals her clear-sighted feminist standpoint:

tho' I have endeavoured to swallow the idea of a positive & immediate engagement in order to satisfy what seemed to be your feelings, I am quite unable to do so; ... You appear to think that in an engagement & early marriage I should find some kind of safety. It would only be so in case I were happy in that engagement & marriage – If on freely associating I or he found that discrepancies arouse, we should not, I most certainly, put an end to any engagement however public sooner than sacrifice a life time. In like manner, did we find after marriage that we were unsuitable we are neither of us people to wear out life in such a union for the sake of public opinion ... all my high opinion of his character, & the confessed attraction which he possesses for me, do not make me easy to jump into a connection involving so much responsibility; & many of whose laws & customs you are well aware I regard with no favour. It is useless & cruel to argue in this matter as if I were an ordinary woman – you know my dear Mother of my opinions & actions lie deep seated in my intellect & in the aims of my whole life. Married life will in no respect easy to me as to most; ... Please to show my Father this letter – I have expressed myself as clearly and as simply as I can, & after 9 weeks of thought⁶⁵

Parkes was a dutiful daughter, respectful and grateful of her parents' advice, but she had a strong sense of self and straightforwardly expressed her own will. Evocative of the reciprocal nature of *Bildung* I have highlighted so far, these letter excerpts are testimony to Parkes' struggle for self-determination. Her epistolary narratives stand for her negotiation of her wish to act in a self-determining way – conforming to her developing sense of being informed by feminism (self-direction). Identifying herself with 'cultivated women' (i.e. feminists) – including Bodichon – and distancing herself from 'ladies' (here representing gender normativity, in her words 'an ordinary woman'), Parkes takes up an uncompromising subject position as a marriageable young woman that

⁶² Parkes to Sam Blackwell, Portmadoc, 28 September 1854, GCPP Parkes 9/8.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Parkes to Bodichon, 13 January 1850, GCPP Parkes 5/44.

⁶⁵ Parkes to Elizabeth Parkes, 15 December 1854, GCPP Parkes 2/4.

claims her right to enter an engagement on her own terms and her right to self-fulfilment at the heart of her eventual marital union. Aware of the 'laws & customs' that make 'cultivated women' tremble (the type of loss of legal rights Bodichon pointed out in her *Brief Summary*), Parkes negotiated her courtship and future married life in her letters to Blackwell and to her mother. She even suggested the possibility of breaking off her engagement and separating herself from her husband in case of 'discrepancies' and 'unsuitable' temperaments. By prioritizing her happiness over social custom, in her epistolary reasoning Parkes directly challenged gender normativity. Although Bodichon's marriage proposal letters are no longer extant, we can nonetheless suggest that she may well have negotiated her autonomy as a marriageable young woman in a similar way – as the following letters *from* Bodichon suggest.

Bodichon's extant correspondence does permit unpacking her negotiation of autonomy after she married Dr Eugène Bodichon. As discussed in chapter 6, during their ten-month honeymoon trip Bodichon gave accounts of their daily routine and household arrangements. While her husband went on long walks, she embarked on sketching sessions on her own and, on bad weather days, she painted indoors in the studios she improvised in their temporary accommodations – her working space. In all her American letters Bodichon projected herself as an accomplished artist at the heart of her marital union, finding self-fulfilment mostly in 'work', i.e. painting. In order to focus on her artistic activities, she asked her husband to be the housekeeper of the house they rented in New Orleans:

If you were here you would go wild as you did at Algiers with the vegetation and the strange mixture of races of people. There is enough to interest us for a month here so we took two rooms and set up housekeeping (Doctor being the housekeeper because, you see, his work [writing] is head work and it is good for him to have a little marketing and house affairs to attend to, and my work [painting] is hard head work and hard hand work too, and I can be at it all day long except when I take walks for exercise). You never saw anyone walk as the Doctor does – twenty or thirty miles all over the country.⁶⁶

Bodichon's narrative is testimony to Bodichon's epistolary articulation of her negotiation of self-determination informed by her feminism; that is, her negotiation of her wish to exercise her personal autonomy (self-conception put

⁶⁶ Bodichon to Jo Gratton, New Orleans, 21 December [1857], Reed, J.W. (ed.) (1972) *An American Diary 1857-1858* (London: Routledge and K. Paul) p.67.

into action) at the heart of her marital union. Directly challenging gender normativity, Bodichon's epistolary narratives illustrate how she articulated her right to self-realization to the point she took it for granted: she considered her artistic endeavours as important as her husband's and as worth respecting (as Parkes expressed to Blackwell in the above letter excerpt). Turning gender roles upside down, she claimed her right to pursue her interests rather than nurturing those of her husband only. In order to do so, she expected him to take responsibility of the household duties that traditionally would have been undertaken or supervised by her.

As examples in the previous chapter illustrated, Bodichon projected her individuality as a traveller with no sign of self-deprecation. Quite on the contrary, she seems to have taken certain delight at displaying her (in the eyes of Victorian society) eccentricity. Back in Algeria and for more than twenty years, Bodichon hosted salons on Saturdays and gave parties where she invited her 'curious' neighbours, 'Nuns, Arabs, Jews, & farmers from Italy, Spain & Malta'. To Anna Jameson she complained that some of the members of the communities with whom she socialized did not approve of her marriage arrangement and leisured routine devoted to painting:

Our life here is very quiet & hard working & one would have thought perfectly inoffensive to any one on earth, but it is not so! The little foolish circles of French & English talk in the most absurd manner about us & find us very offensive. Have you read Mill "On Liberty"? It delights us. I wish all these people could read it. To a certain extent we live on his principles!

We hope some winter that you will come out to us and have some months here to study the country and its inhabitants. The journey is not very difficult & every day becomes easier.

Next winter I hope we shall have a better supply of English; this year they are not very refined or well instructed and I have not made a single valuable acquaintance. I had a little glimpse of one group which next year perhaps may be much to us, as they will take a house on our hill. Our neighbours are curious – Nuns, Arabs, Jews, and farmers from Italy, Spain and Malta.⁶⁷

Mobilizing the permeating narrative of the companionate marriage (captured most famously in John Stuart Mills' *The Subjection of Women*)⁶⁸ and

⁶⁷ Bodichon to Anna Jameson, Algiers, 21 April 1859, GCPP Bodichon 4/16.

⁶⁸ Mill's book was published in 1869, after this letter excerpt was written. But the idea of the companionate marriage was a discourse that circulated at least among the sort of people with whom Bodichon socialized by the time she wrote this letter to Jameson.

distancing herself from those 'little foolish' people representing propriety and conventionalism, as Parkes did with Fane and Blackwell, in her epistolary narrative Bodichon claimed her right to personal self-fulfilment within her marriage. Identifying herself with the discourse of 'the marriage of true minds' circulated among the like-minded liberal reformers she socialized with in England, Bodichon was determined to pursue her artistic career insouciant of compromising her femininity. This letter excerpt also attests to Bodichon's articulation of her process of self-alienation as effected by travelling. In her narrative she negotiates her life as a settler within a daily routine dedicated to painting at the heart of the community of expatriates.

Bodichon kept negotiating her self-determination in letters throughout her life, adapting herself to life contingencies and incorporating new or nuanced elements of her self-conception. After some years of marriage she realized that her husband did not find living in England, particularly in London, very congenial. He spent most of his time in Sussex. As he did not learn English to a significant level, he was dependent on the company of those among Bodichon's friends who spoke French, like Parkes; and not all Bodichon's friends wished to get involved with him, including Bodichon's siblings. There is also evidence that on several occasions he did not travel to England with his wife. Bodichon also began to shorten her stays in Algeria, coming to England in February and leaving as late as November.⁶⁹ Writing to her friend William Allingham in 1867 she once said:

I have been very ill in Africa with the fever of the country and I have a better perception than I used to have, of the dreary moods of life – for a long time I was so weak that hope and life seemed to have gone out. But no more of that – courage and health seem to be coming back together and perhaps being ill has given me a wider sympathy. No! I shall not be in London at all this year. I mean to stay here [Scalands Gate, Sussex] until the woods are too damp and wet to allow me to live out of doors, - at present I am out on horseback at 8 a.m. and the rest of the day very nearly all the hours of it are spent in my little wood [painting]; I have got an old wood-cutter to cut out paths and glimpses of views, and now we are cutting a clearing to build some cottages on to let for two shillings a week each (when built), and perhaps I may build a little school if the good clergyman's family don't worry me too much (every one wanted to convert me

⁶⁹ Hirsch, P. (1998) p.190, pp.230-232, p.276, pp.284-285, and p.296.

when I looked so ill): I want to have an infant school here very much.⁷⁰

Having suffered from typhoid fever in Algeria earlier that year, Bodichon came back to England sooner than usual, spending some weeks in Paris with Parkes recovering. Dr Bodichon does not seem to have travelled to England that summer and we know, via a letter Bodichon wrote to Emily Blackwell two weeks later, that she did not travel to Algeria that winter either (1867-1868).⁷¹ Bodichon was discreet about her marital problems. It is only by means of references to her priorities that she subtly expressed her discontent within her marriage. Bodichon seems to have been aware that the companionate love she experienced soon after her marriage did not take the form of the supportive relationship she had expected. As Hirsch states, Dr Bodichon respected her career and 'did not crowd her'.⁷² But as years passed by, his 'lack of aesthetic interest created a gulf in their sympathies'. Bodichon wished 'he would take the same compelling interest in her work that George Lewes took in Marian's'.⁷³ Within this context of marital estrangement, Bodichon opted to focus on her own interests, as she did as a single woman. As she explained in her letter to Allingham, challenging normativity, she decided to remain in Scalands to concentrate on her painting and her philanthropic projects.

All in all, these letter excerpts are illustrative of Bodichon's struggle for autonomy as a married woman: how she revised her self-conception by making sense of life contingencies and evolving wishes. Bodichon underwent the same kind of readjustment after the series of strokes she suffered aged 50 onwards. Although she partially recovered her powers of speech and mobility, she remained a semi-invalid the rest of her life. Thereafter her handwriting became shaky. In her relapses, she had her personal correspondence read and written by an amanuensis.⁷⁴ Her shaky handwriting and her voice mediated by a letter-writer reflect to what extent her new state conditioned her exercise of autonomy. Reduced in powers, she pursued her projects accordingly. She kept interested in

⁷⁰ Bodichon to William Allingham, Scalands Gate, Robertsbridge, Hurst Green, 10 September 1867, Allingham, H. and Williams, E.B. (eds) (1911) p.83.

⁷¹ Bodichon to Emily Blackwell, 28 September [1867], Schlesinger, Box 13 Folder 185.

⁷² Hirsch, P. (1998) p.163.

⁷³ Ibid, p.133.

⁷⁴ Bodichon to Norman Moore, Scalands Gate, 1 July 1880, GCPP Bodichon 11/6, Hancox 1/358; Bodichon to Caroline Wells Healey Dall, Scalands Gate, 10 July 1890, Massachusetts Historical Society, Caroline Wells Healey Dall Papers.

(women's) education, travelling and painting until the end but she accommodated her endeavours into her physical possibilities.

Ultimately, my suggestion is that Bodichon managed to exercise autonomy. In *Bildung's* conceptual framework, she succeeded in putting into action her individuality. Or rather, since referentiality cannot be easily demonstrated, Bodichon projected an articulation of her action as a self-determining agent. As noted in chapter 3, this exercise of autonomy is not to be understood in absolute terms but as a capacity exercised by degrees. As the examples I discussed in this chapter suggest, resonating with the idea of partial self-alienation (see chapter 6), her exercise of autonomy occasionally foreclosed autonomy on others.

Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed the last dimension of *Bildung* I highlight in this thesis: personal autonomy. Following Diana Meyers' theoretical project, I examined the role of letters in Bodichon's struggle for autonomy: her striving for acting conforming to her sense of self. Following Humboldt's notion of contact with the other as a source of self-understanding, in this chapter I suggested that, simultaneously to the act of communicating, letters acted as sites where Bodichon projected an articulation of her self-determination in interaction with her correspondents. In Meyers' terms, Bodichon envisaged in her letters a life plan, which she revised according to life's contingencies and her evolving sense of self. Her epistolary narratives are testimony to what in Meyers' conceptual vocabulary are the processes of self-discovery, self-definition and programmatic and episodic self-direction. In line with *Bildung's* notion of self-alienation leading to a critical engagement with the world, I argued that in the process of verbalizing her struggle for autonomy, Bodichon mobilized permeating discourses, including prescriptive notions of bourgeois femininity. That is, drawing on norms of cultural intelligibility and determined by the distinct features of the genre of letter-writing, her epistolary "I" stands for an agentic engagement with discursive regimes. Autonomy here is conceived as a competence exercised by degrees, not in absolute terms – as the Kantian notion of autonomy would have it. Thus, she carved out an artistic career that, although it remained within an ambiguous status, challenged to a certain extent men's exclusive claims to professionalism.

Likewise, she became an enthusiastic and generous philanthropist and, in terms of her private life, she negotiated her self-fulfilment at the heart of her marital union.

In my examination of Bodichon's self-determination I outlined that Bodichon's epistolary self-projections as a self-determining agent seem to be embedded in feminism. She presented her artistic and philanthropic activities as fuelled by her claim to her right to self-realization. Yet, occasionally, her feminist, philanthropic and artistic endeavours stood in tension. As such, the apparent embeddedness of her feminism was disrupted by a tense juxtaposition of interests. At some points the seeming complementary relationship between her endeavours stood in conflict. As her biographers claim, Bodichon seems to have found it difficult to attend to all her interests.

Understood as one's capacity to act in harmony with one's self and as a matter of degree, I conclude that Bodichon did exercise her autonomy. However, in line with the idea of partial self-alienation discussed in chapter 6, in this chapter I argued that Bodichon's self-determination was exercised at the expense of certain social categories. This exclusivity is clearly evident in her epistolary self-projections as a social reformer for instance: while taking for granted her own *Bildung*, she denied the lower classes the type of autonomous subjectivity she claimed for herself and for other feminist subjects. In line with my conclusion in chapter 6, Bodichon's critical thinking and self-alienation failed to overcome certain prejudices.

Having explored the significance of letters in the development of Bodichon's *Bildung*, in my concluding chapter I assess Bodichon's gendered epistolary articulation of self-cultivation and I reflect on my reading of Bodichon's letters through the lens of this contentious neo-humanist concept.

8 Conclusion

Introduction

In this last chapter I offer some concluding remarks on the epistolary study of Barbara Bodichon's *Bildung* I have developed in this thesis. In section 8.1. I argue that Bodichon managed to subvert *Bildung*'s masculinist underpinnings and succeeded in making the most of her excellent – albeit gendered – education. She gained the knowledge that she seemingly sought through her rather unsystematic but wide-ranging and stimulating home education and informal learning; and she put the critical outlook she developed into use in the form of an apparently fulfilling life as a painter and social reformer. However, she did so at the expense of an exclusionary outlook – an aspect of her figure that biographers only briefly tackle. I argue that this problematic viewpoint reflects *Bildung*'s tension between individuality and normativity.

In section 8.2. I discuss the potential of *Bildung* as a thinking tool when combined with Judith Butler's notion of *performativity*. I examine the ontological tension between *Bildung*'s and *performative*'s antagonistic conceptualizations of subjectivity and I argue that this tension can be used as a means to unpack the nature of historical knowledge as it emerges from epistolary narratives. Against *Bildung*'s notion of a complete and harmonious self, the "I" that emerges from Bodichon's epistolary dialogues is a complex, multiple, ever unfolding, fragmented, incomplete, and in the end, unresolved self. That being so, my suggestion is that, Bodichon's self is not easily identified by means of her *epistolarium* and that her 'lived' "I" is a phenomenon that historians may not be able to recover. Notwithstanding the elusive nature of Bodichon's (epistolary) self, I argue that the knowledge we gather through her letter-exchange is valuable since it provides a partial yet insightful understanding of the unfolding of her agentic becoming. In turn, within Bodichon's *epistolarium*, 'letters to' offer insights about the dialogical and reciprocal nature of Bodichon's and her female correspondents' *Bildung*. 'Letters about' Bodichon enable Bodichon's *Bildung* to be further assessed via an examination of how her self-images were reproduced and circulated by correspondents. At the end of this section I discuss the cross-epistemological approach that underpins my research project.

I conclude this thesis by highlighting the significance of my *performative* reading of Bodichon's letters as sources of *Bildung* and I suggest new avenues for future work.

8.1 An Assessment of Bodichon's Epistolary *Bildung*

In this thesis I have read Bodichon's personal correspondence through the lens of *Bildung*. As a thinking tool, *Bildung* permits highlighting the significance of letters in the development of Bodichon's education. Parallel to the act of communicating, letters acted as educational instruments – as sources of *Bildung*. As I aimed to illustrate throughout chapters 5, 6 and 7, letters functioned as dialogical forums where Bodichon further acquired knowledge and exercised her critical thinking; she (partially) forged her identity as a traveller at the intersection of her feminist, philanthropic and artistic activities; and she negotiated her autonomy – here understood as her capacity to act in harmony with her evolving self-conception. In *Bildung's* conceptual vocabulary, letters acted as spaces where, determined by the features of the genre and articulated within a matrix of discourses, Bodichon carved out her individuality. In the process, in line with *Bildung's* requirement to engage critically with the world, Bodichon reappropriated culturally-bound circulating discourses. In this sense, an examination of Bodichon's epistolary *Bildung* sheds light onto informal sources of education in the context of mid-Victorian (upper-)middle-class culture. Ultimately, *Bildung* permits suggesting letter-writing, an apparently innocuous practice, as a fertile source of female agency. The sanctioned (feminine) diary habit of letter-writing turned out to be a subversive practice. That being so, Bodichon can be regarded as having succeeded in negotiating the masculinist underpinnings of *Bildung*. Encouraged by a favourable Unitarian and progressive family environment, Bodichon did develop her *Bildung* through letter-exchanges. As I will now discuss, Bodichon's was a *gendered* mode of self-cultivation that led to a seemingly self-fulfilling lifestyle.

In line with the Unitarian philosophy of education outlined in chapter 3, Bodichon acquired a higher standard of education than that on average provided to middle-class girls from other religious denominations. Resonating with *Bildung's* balanced programme of intellectual, spiritual, aesthetic, and physical

development (a general education that cultivates each individual's unique abilities), Bodichon's 'peculiar education' consisted of personal tuition in a wide range of subjects, unrestricted access to reading, stimulating family discussions, educative trips at home and abroad, and thought-provoking letter-exchanges. Bodichon's engaging access to knowledge was possible thanks to Benjamin Smith's progressive outlook on girls' education – representative of the most open-minded approaches within Unitarianism.

In the context of the Prussian educational reform of 1809-1810, Humboldt envisaged the school and the university as the most appropriate places for formative social intercourse. His wish to reform the state education in place was precisely to overcome the kind of rote and unappealing learning Bodichon experienced at the Misses Woods (see chapter 5). Unlike Humboldt's ideal school setting, the strongest point in Bodichon's instruction was not her schooling but her home/informal education. Whereas other middle-class girls were being taught 'accomplishments', true to the *Bildung* ethos of a holistic education that permits individuals to explore and develop their potential, Bodichon learnt literature, history, Latin, political economy, most probably arithmetic too, and was trained in painting. Bodichon's home education seems to have consisted of an informal and seemingly unsystematic teaching (rather against *Bildung*'s idea of methodical scholarship). Her irregular educational experience at home triggered her interest in knowledge for its own sake – the essence of *Bildung*'s neo-humanism. Before the end of her teenage years she came to the conclusion that 'Gaining knowledge is a moral duty'.¹ Bodichon's *Bildung*-like thirst for critical knowledge as part of her self-formation was acquired, not in school (as Humboldt wished it to be for Prussian men), but within her informal home education.

Later in life, Bodichon's regular travels exposed her to a wide variety of environments to which she adapted and which she incorporated into her sense of self. This exposure to the unknown permitted her to distance herself from her viewpoints and to critically engage with difference albeit, as illustrated, within a limited counter-hegemonic outlook. Within this progressive upbringing and nomadic lifestyle, Bodichon negotiated her exercise of self-determination: to live in accordance with her evolving self-conception as a philanthropist, women's rights campaigner, and artist.

¹ Burton, H. (1949) *Barbara Bodichon, 1827-1891* (London: J. Murray) p.14.

However, Unitarians' educational philosophy was essentially conceived within a domestic paradigm that in the end prevented women like Bodichon from full equal access to the education their male counterparts enjoyed. In other words, Bodichon's education – her *Bildung* – was gendered, and thus, not fully egalitarian vis-à-vis her brothers'. Bodichon was provided with virtually the same home education as them but she did not have access to the secondary and higher education from which they benefitted. Bodichon and her sisters attended a Unitarian girls' school which seems to have been run by 'genteel' but in no way professional educationists. Unlike Bodichon and her sisters, after having shared a home education, the Leigh Smith brothers were sent to Bruce Castle, Tottenham – one of the most successful Unitarian boys' schools of the time.² Then the two boys started as boarding pupils at a Unitarian school in Brede, 6 miles from Hastings.³ In October 1848 Ben entered Jesus College, Cambridge, and in 1849 William went to the Royal Agricultural College.⁴ Unlike boys, the provision of formal secondary education for middle-class girls like Bodichon was limited and no formal higher education was available to them at all. In the same way, although her family encouraged her intellectual abilities and nurtured the development of her individuality, Bodichon was not expected to channel her broad education into a profession – as her brothers were. In this sense, as Ruth Watts suggests, the Unitarian educational ideal did not prove to be totally egalitarian;⁵ and Bodichon's education was no exception. As such, Bodichon's was a gendered development of *Bildung*.

Despite her gendered self-cultivation, Bodichon's educational scheme seems to have fed her feminist lifestyle, her feminist campaigning, her social

² It was an experimental school established by Sir Rowland Hill and his family in 1829. The rationale was to stimulate the desire for knowledge in pupils. Corporal punishment was forbidden and students were taught at that time an unorthodox syllabus which included foreign languages, science, and engineering, Hirsch, P. (1998) *Barbara Bodichon: Feminist, Artist and Rebel* (London: Chatto and Windus) p.19; Pegram, J. (1987) *From Manor House... to Museum* (London: Hornsey Historical Society) p.10.

³ Bodichon to James Buchanan, Pelham Crescent, Hastings, 10 October 1848, Buchanan, B.I. (ed.) (1923) *Buchanan Family Records: James Buchanan and his Descendants* (Capetown: Townshend, Taylor and Snashall) p.17.

⁴ Bodichon to James Buchanan, Pelham Crescent, Hastings, 10 October 1848, Buchanan, B.I. (ed.) (1923) p.17. The college was founded in Cirencester in 1845 and was aimed at training students for a scientific approach to farming, Hirsch, P. (1998) p.31. Benjamin Smith participated in the college as a share holder. The £30 share certificate is held in Cambridge University, Girton College Archives, Girton College Personal Papers (GCPP) Bodichon 11/1.

⁵ Watts, R. (1998) *Gender, Power and the Unitarians* (London and New York: Longman).

reform, and her painting. Judging by the comments expressed in her letters,⁶ its engaging methods and comprehensive curriculum provided the means by which she seems to have sought to fulfil her intellectual inquietude. Most notably, while her brothers were at school and in university/college, Bodichon pursued her intellectual curiosity by attending public lectures and reading freely on a variety of fields of knowledge, which she discussed with her friends face-to-face or by letter. She had a fond memory of her tutors and was thankful of the freedom she had in her pursuit of knowledge. At the same time, aware of her privileged education and upbringing, she fought to improve the provision of education for middle-class women; and, resenting not being able to enrol for a university degree, she took the foundation of Girton College to heart.⁷

At a time when, as Watts argues, gender constraints prevented Unitarian women from putting their advanced learning into effective use,⁸ Bodichon succeeded in putting hers into effect both at a personal level and in terms of social engagement⁹ – a practical understanding of education that resonates with *Bildung*'s principle of promoting social transformation through individuals' self-development. The critical outlook Bodichon developed through this thought-provoking educational scheme was channelled into a professional artistic career and into philanthropy and social reform in favour of women's rights. Thus, she asserted her right to pursue a career by cultivating her artistic talent to a professional level which she interwove with her philanthropic and feminist commitments. Her sense of 'social justice', transmitted through her family's tradition of political engagement and further developed throughout her learning, led her to demand improvements in women's position in society – becoming one of the leading figures of the mid-Victorian women's movement. In other words, while her brothers exercised their professions, Bodichon carved hers: a life committed to social reform and artistic production. That being so, her gendered, yet ultimately 'superior' education, is testimony to Bodichon's agency in making

⁶ Unlike Bodichon, some of her friends coming from other religious denominations such as Emily Davies bitterly complained about the lack of educational resources they were provided with.

⁷ In 1869 she wrote to her feminist colleague Helen Taylor: 'ever since my brother went to Cambridge I have always intended to aim at the establishment of a College where women would have the same education as men if they wished it', Bodichon to Helen Taylor, Scalds, 6 August 1869, London School of Economics, Mill-Taylor Collection 12/50; Hirsch, P. (1998) p.31.

⁸ Watts, R. (1998) p.100, p.161, p.165, and p.175.

⁹ In line with Watts' assertion on the gendered nature of women's public participation (Watts, R. (1998) p.109, pp.117–118, p.175 and especially chapter 8), Bodichon pursued her artistic career and her feminist campaigning both within and beyond acceptable bounds.

the most of her privileged, though not fully egalitarian, upbringing. In this sense, the informal home education Bodichon received seems to move away from the 'negative' understanding of 'informal' education among girls which, according to Michelle Cohen, by the end of the eighteenth century was a synonym for superficial learning (see section 3.1.). Bodichon's education was gendered and thus not fully egalitarian; but her 'informal' educational scheme seems to have been a dynamic and rich source of learning and her family seems to have encouraged her to put it into use in the form of a feminist lifestyle and social reform.

Bodichon's *Bildung* developed to the detriment of certain social categories though. As a thinking tool, *Bildung* also permits unpacking problematic aspects of Bodichon's feminism that her biographers only briefly address – the bourgeois and ethnocentric underpinnings of her outlook. *Bildung* was conceived as an emancipatory and critical project. For, as discussed in section 3.2.2., resonating with Unitarians' notion of educational environmentalism, *Bildung's* anti-essentialism involves an epigenetic conceptualization of human beings whereby individuals are not determined by their nature but chiefly by their own practices. In turn, this anti-essentialist approach is translated into a critical review of the world. *Bildung* stands for an emancipatory ideal (for the growing bourgeoisie only) in terms of cultural transformation. In order to achieve this social enhancement through personal growth, *Bildung* requires men to establish a free and diverse interaction with the world. It is through social intercourse that man's skills and abilities fully develop. The *gebildet* man cultivates his talents and, ultimately, acts in a harmonious fashion: respecting his individuality and in submission to ethical demands. This harmony between man and the outer world involves a tension between individuality and normativity. *Bildung* consists of an endless endeavour to reconcile the utmost receptivity to the most diverse experience of the unknown with one's individuality. *Bildung* is a dialectical struggle between man and his environment.

As I noted in section 3.4., drawing on Michael Foucault's theoretical project, Jan Masschelein and Norbert Ricken state that *Bildung* requires a simultaneous process of individualization and totalisation in which individuals become part of a

normative totality embedded in power relations.¹⁰ On that account, self-alienation, autonomy and individuality as promoted by *Bildung* may be regarded as a fallacy. For self-determining individuals are in fact the effect of a normative subjectivity; self-alienation is caught by references to alterity that are imbued with relations of dependency and power;¹¹ and one's individuality is but a particularization of a totality constituted by 'truth games'. As such, as Michael Wimmer points out, *Bildung* may be interpreted as 'nothing but an illusion, an idea or a promise that even after 200 years, we are still far from seeing realized'.¹² In this sense, Bodichon's *Bildung* could be interpreted as an unachieved (unattainable?) scheme.

Instead of reading *Bildung* as a doomed project, my suggestion is that *Bildung* is a thinking tool that facilitates the discussion of Bodichon's exercise of agency – as triggered by feminism and exercised via epistolary dialogues. *Bildung's* underpinning tension between normativity and individuality can be used as a tool to unpack the implications of Bodichon's exercise of self-cultivation, namely her problematic standpoint. As discussed in section 3.4.2., drawing on Masschelein and Ricken's view I suggest that Bodichon's epistolary self illustrates the twofold conceptualization of power proposed by Foucault whereby power is simultaneously oppressive and productive. Bodichon's epistolary "I" is at the same time an effect of power (it is articulated within (gendered) discursive regimes, as outlined by Masschelein and Ricken) and the *relais* of power (it contributes to circulating oppressive assumptions about certain social categories). Thus, Bodichon's epistolary subject positions challenged gender normativity at the same time that she drew on certain unquestioned assumptions. Failing to overcome certain prejudices, Bodichon's resulting standpoint was caught by certain classist and colonialist beliefs that contributed to dominant discourses on middle-class superiority and Otherness. As such, Bodichon's *Bildung* can be

¹⁰ Masschelein, J. and Ricken, N. (2003) 'Do We (Still) Need the Concept of *Bildung*?', *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 35 (2) pp.139-154 (pp.139-142).

¹¹ Christiane Thompson states that individuals are unable 'to experience and understand the alien'. For, 'Since our perspective remains inextricably bound to the structures and categories of our own cultural and social background, we will never be able to grasp the alien as alien', Thompson, C. (2006) 'Adorno and the Borders of Experience: The Significance of the Nonidentical for a "Different" Theory of *Bildung*', *Educational Theory*, 56 (1) pp.69-87 (p.85).

¹² Wimmer, M. (2003) 'Ruins of *Bildung* in a Knowledge Society: Commenting on the Debate about the Future of *Bildung*', *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 23 (2) pp.167-187 (p.170).

interpreted as being exercised to the detriment of certain social groups; hers was a counter-hegemonic viewpoint within limits.

As noted in section 2.1., Bodichon studies focus on Bodichon's 'achievements' and the resulting portrait tends to be rather unproblematically positive. Sheila Herstein does point out Bodichon's bourgeois standpoint. Referring to Bodichon's article 'Middle Class Schools for Girls', published in 1860, Herstein recognizes that Bodichon speaks as an upper-middle-class philanthropist offering a 'voluntary and charitable' solution to the low provision of education that women coming from 'a class far below her own' received.¹³ But she concludes her biography by claiming that 'Bodichon's feminism was radical in that she believed in complete sexual equality in the home and in the state': 'She believed in the removal of all disabilities affecting women. Absolute equality of opportunity for men and women in all areas of public and domestic life was her eventual goal'.¹⁴ As I aimed to show in this thesis, Bodichon's feminist outlook is more complicated than this assessment suggests. Her stance partially drew on the circulating discourse of the distinct characteristics of the female nature. This aspect of her feminism emerges for example in the letter she wrote to Marian Evans in 1866 referring to the industrial village of Mettray, France (see section 7.3.). She adopted the discourse on the care-taking nature of womanhood to suggest the presence of women in the *colonie* as a way of making it a proper 'family' institution. As such, Bodichon did not put into question the existence of a biologically determined and determining female nature. That being so, Herstein's statement that Bodichon defended 'Absolute equality of opportunity for men and women in all areas of public and domestic life' requires nuancing. For Bodichon did make a distinction between gendered social roles, albeit not the prescriptive limiting ones with which she disagreed. Likewise, Herstein's assertion that Bodichon 'believed in the removal of all disabilities affecting women' does not account for the exclusionary elements of Bodichon's feminist outlook I have highlighted in this thesis.

In reference to Bodichon's ethnocentric stance, Pam Hirsch acknowledges that 'Perhaps her landscapes, celebrating the beauty of Algeria, could be seen as complicit in the production of an Orientalist Other for the consumption of

¹³ Herstein, S. (1985) *A Mid-Victorian Feminist, Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press) p.69.

¹⁴ Herstein, S. (1985) p.195.

Western purchasers'. But Hirsch concludes that 'this was certainly not her intention'. For 'Her own view of her role in Algeria was more curatorial, capturing a landscape, sometimes peopled, sometimes not, *before* it was overly Europeanised'.¹⁵ Alternatively, reading her letters as produced within systems of signification, in this thesis I have worked to unpack the extent to which Bodichon, caught by cultural prejudices she did not challenge, was complicit in oppressive discourses. Articulating her subjectivity within norms of cultural intelligibility, Bodichon drew on (dominant) discourses precisely to be in a position to make her words (and paintings of landscapes) intelligible to her audiences. In this way, Bodichon was both the effect and the *relais* of power. Bodichon's resulting standpoint reflects the tension in *Bildung* between individuality and normativity highlighted above. (Inversely, Bodichon's letters provide an opportunity to revise Humboldt's conceptualization of *Bildung* by drawing the attention to its apparent internal contradiction).

As I discuss in the following section, using *Bildung* as a thinking tool in tandem with Butler's notion of *performativity* also facilitates the discussion of the production of historical knowledge when working with letters.

8.2 A Cross-Epistemological Study of Bodichon

In this thesis I have undertaken a *performative* reading of Bodichon's personal correspondence through the lens of *Bildung*. As briefly noted in chapter 4, interweaving *Bildung* with *performativity* creates an ontological tension between two antagonistic understandings of subjectivity. The humanist subject that undertakes *Bildung* is a rational, self-aware, coherent, unified and autonomous self governed by free will. *Bildung* presupposes the existence of a core self, capable of rational awareness and self-determination – a 'true' self that, in the process of self-cultivation, is enhanced and developed to its fullest potential. At the other end of the spectrum, the poststructuralist subject is conceptualized as a disjointed, ever unfolding, and elusive self, driven by conscious and unconscious emotions and desires. The poststructuralist subject is an effect of language. As a system of signification, language exists in the form of

¹⁵ Hirsch, P. (1998) p.139.

competing and often contradictory discourses which involve relations of power. Discourses constitute subjectivity through material practices that shape both bodies and minds. The thinking subject takes up positions – whether in thought or speech – where s/he engages with these discursive fields. Discourses produce subjects within relations of power that at the same time involve resistance. There is no space for subjectivity beyond discourses and the power relations that govern them but resistance is possible from within. For discursive fields include contradictory and conflicting practices that create the space for new forms of knowledge and practices.¹⁶ In poststructuralism, power is culturally pervasive and centrifugally dispersed; it is everywhere; it is embedded in everyday life. As a result, power is inescapable.¹⁷

The ontological tension between *Bildung* and *performativity* prompts an epistemological discussion about the production of historical knowledge. Against *Bildung*'s notion of a congruous, coherent and complete self (in Humboldt's words quoted in section 3.2. 'the highest and most harmonious development of his powers to a complete and consistent whole'), the "I" that emerges from Bodichon's epistolary dialogues is a complex self: multiple, versatile, fragmented, ever unfolding, and incomplete. In her *epistolarium* Bodichon is revealed as a loyal confidante; a funny and entertaining friend; a well-read and energetic young woman; a politically committed daughter and niece; a loving former pupil; an assertive wife; a fearless and daring traveller; a self-confident and defying artist; a deep-seated educationist; a staunch yet rather ethnocentric feminist; and an engaged yet somewhat patronizing philanthropist. I reconstruct Bodichon's outlook out of fragmented traces revealed in her letters. Thus for instance, what can be gleaned about her approach as a social reformer – e.g. a secular educationist and a rather condescending philanthropist – comes from fragments of letters sent to different correspondents – Parkes, Evans and Allingham. The resulting portrait is incomplete. For only a fraction of her letters are extant. Of these, some are cut and therefore partially unreadable. Others are in typed copy only and these typescripts are taken here on trust. Bodichon's portrait is further complicated by the fact that the bulk of her *epistolarium* consists of letters to and

¹⁶ Weedon, C. (2003) 'Subjects', in Eagleton, M. (ed.) *A Concise Companion to Feminist Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell) pp.125-126.

¹⁷ Smith, S. and Watson, J. (1998) *Women, Autobiography, Theory. A Reader* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press) p.22.

about her. The image that emerges in these narratives confirms but also nuances her self-image as articulated in the letters she wrote. Thus for instance, in her epistolary narratives Bodichon projects herself as a confident professional painter, known beyond her audience in England, exhibiting her watercolours as far as America, selling her artwork to unknown buyers, and asserting her self-belief independently of the artistic establishment. Yet, some letters about her disclose a nuanced understanding of her artistic self-image – one that implies the ambiguous status of her artistic career as an amateur/professional painter.

Bildung's notion of a consistent whole is further undermined by reading letter-writing as a *performative* act. On that account, Bodichon's epistolary "I" does not reflect her 'core' self, but her subjectivity as articulated in the particular case of letters. In this thesis I have read letter-writing as a *performative* act of self-narrating constitutive of the self; as an autobiographical gesture that functions as a source of self-formation – coexisting alongside myriad other forms of self-production. As such, the self that emerges from Bodichon's epistolary narratives is not flesh-and-blood Bodichon but the epistolary articulation of her self-constitution. Bodichon's circulating self-images – her epistolary self-projections – disclose a partial yet insightful knowledge of the unfolding of her becoming: her discursive positioning as articulated within the enabling characteristics of the epistolary genre.

Bodichon's epistolary self-constitution may not fully correspond to the self-images she articulated in the countless other forms through which she forged her selfhood (e.g. in her paintings, in her publications). Thus for instance, Bodichon's sketch 'Ye Newe Generation' is a confident assertion of her early artistic becoming and a positive statement in favour of women's right to a professional identity that suggests an inclusive vision of the future generation of professional women. Yet, her feminist unfolding as articulated in other epistolary narratives implies a rather exclusive understanding of the feminist subject that leaves out some categories of women. As letter-writing (and paintings and publications) form autobiographical acts constitutive of her self, it is possible to presume a correlation between her epistolary "I" on the one hand and otherwise-articulated "I"s on the other. That being so, Bodichon's epistolary narratives would offer plausible hints about how she 'lived' her *Bildung* – how she fashioned her self-cultivation in 'lived' gestures. At the same time, her epistolary narratives reveal complementing, overlapping and opposing aspects of her subjectivity. And further nuances are revealed when

her epistolary “I” is contrasted with her self-formation as visually articulated or in her pamphlets (and when we contrast her epistolary “I” with her epistolary “you” and especially with letters about her). Accordingly, a comparable tension can be assumed to exist between her epistolary self-projections on the one hand and her visual self-image, her ‘lived’ fashioning and her publications on the other. This contrast is further marked by comparing her textual (and visual) “I” with the second- and third-person images that emerge from letters to and about her and from newspaper reviews of her feminist and philanthropic endeavours.

For the multiple, versatile, fragmented, and incomplete nature of her epistolary self (distinctly articulated in other supports), my suggestion is that Bodichon’s is, in the end, an unresolved self. It cannot be accurately identified by means of her epistolary dialogues. Moving away from *Bildung*’s notion of a harmonious totality, Bodichon’s *gebildet* self is more difficult to pin down than an unproblematic reading of autobiographical material would suggest. Bodichon’s ‘lived’ self is a phenomenon historians may not be able to recuperate. Notwithstanding the elusive nature of her (epistolary) self, Bodichon’s *epistolarium* is a rich source of insightful knowledge about her. Undertaking a *performative* reading of Bodichon’s personal correspondence through the lens of *Bildung* has permitted tracing the *development* of Bodichon’s feminism. An analysis of her epistolary narratives reveals how she articulated and forged her outlook in dialogue with her correspondents, displaying versatile self-projections where she intertwined her feminist, reformist and artistic interests. In this sense, my epistolary study of Bodichon’s *Bildung* sheds new light on scholarship examinations of her feminism as articulated in publications. Likewise, within Bodichon’s *epistolarium*, letters addressed to her permit highlighting the intersubjective development of Bodichon’s self-cultivation, and thus, her feminism. ‘Letters to’ offer insights about the type of feedback and encouragement that fuelled Bodichon’s self-cultivation and which illustrates the essence of *Bildung*, i.e. forging one’s individuality through interactive social intercourse. ‘Letters to’ also permit drawing attention to the reciprocal and simultaneous development of Bodichon’s female correspondents’ self-cultivation: Anna Mary Howitt, Marian Evans and most notably Bessie Parkes. In turn, ‘letters about’ Bodichon enable Bodichon’s *Bildung* to be further assessed in that they permit pointing out how her self-images were reproduced and circulated by correspondents. As discussed in section 7.4, the letters Parkes addressed to Sam

Blackwell and her mother and to a lesser extent the letters she sent to Robert Fane and her father – letters “about” Bodichon – also provide evidence of the simultaneous development of Parkes’ *Bildung*.

Using *Bildung* as a thinking tool in the context of a *performative* reading of Bodichon’s letters enables the exploration of a cross-epistemological approach to epistolary research that draws on poststructuralism and highlights the significance of Bodichon’s epistolary voice and experience. Informed by poststructuralism, I have conceived letters as mediated sources: our access to them is conditioned by the politics of the archive and epistolary narratives are articulated within permeating discourses and conditioned by the features of the genre. Acknowledging the discursive ontology of epistolary narratives, I have accounted for the ideological “I” in Bodichon’s letters as articulated within the enabling characteristics of letter-writing.

At the same time, this theoretical project has maintained letters as sources of knowledge about women’s experiences via a threefold combination of analysis and has retained the study of experience – the hallmark of women’s history – as a source of knowledge about historical phenomena and about women as historical agents. Following Louise Newman, I acknowledge that ‘the perspective afforded by poststructuralist theories no longer enables us to think of women’s history as an accurate reconstruction of objective experiences’. Still, not wishing to ‘give up on the project of writing the history of women’s experiences’ either, in this thesis I have sought to ‘untangle the relationships between discourses and experiences by exploring the ways in which [Bodichon] mediated or transformed discourses’ in her specific historical setting.¹⁸ In line with women’s historians warnings of the ‘immobilizing’ effects of poststructuralist understandings of experience, my reading of Bodichon’s letters has sought to account for her agency: how Bodichon succeeded in individuating her subjectivity – how she forged her *Bildung* – in the context of a male-dominated society. Throughout chapters 5, 6 and 7, I have teased out how she mediated sexual difference, through discourse reappropriation and thanks to other favourable personal circumstances. As Laura Lee Downs suggested back in 1993 (see section 4.1.), recovering women’s experience may be compatible with analyzing the mechanism whereby sexual

¹⁸ Newman, L. (1991) ‘Dialogue: Critical Theory and the History of Women: What’s at Stake in Deconstructing Women’s History’, *Journal of Women’s History*, 2 (3) pp.58-68 (p.66).

difference is 'agentically' mediated. Recovering women's experiences and assessing their place in historical phenomena are relevant for feminist history. Thus, in this thesis I have applied a revised understanding of experience: accounting for its mediated nature, I have teased out Bodichon's discursive positioning as articulated within the enabling features of the epistolary genre. Based on the content of her personal correspondence and on the discourses she (and the other epistolary "I"s in her *epistolarium*) mobilized to take up epistolary subject positions, I have in turn analysed the significance of letters in her (and her female correspondents') exercise of epistolary agency. Based on Bodichon's (discursive) experience, I have resorted to interpretative analysis to suggest that letters functioned as educational tools – as sources of *Bildung*. I have put into play a revised understanding of experience as a source of knowledge about an historical agent – Bodichon – and about historical phenomena – informal sources of education for middle-class women.

This cross-epistemological approach has prompted a reflection about the presence of my own subjectivity in my study of Bodichon's epistolary *Bildung* and the nature of the historical account I argue in this thesis. As I discussed in chapter 4, letters do not speak for themselves. Intended readers of letters (and researchers today) are sources of signification. Reconstructing and interpreting historical knowledge from surviving sources is a subjective endeavour. In the process, historical subjects and events are moved away from their alleged neutrality to the discursivity of the researcher herself. As Bennett acknowledges, the agenda of historical study is led by our own ideological, political and social concerns: feminist politics 'informs the questions that frame my research ... it shapes some of the methods with which I approach my archival work ... [and] it inspires, too, some of the implications I draw from my conclusions'.¹⁹ As a result, to a certain extent I impose shape on the past. Acknowledging my subjectivity and assessing its impact on my research has been part of my responsibility as a researcher to be self-reflective in this project. Historian Ruth Roach Pierson warns us that 'the historian is always in some sense in a position of control over the

¹⁹ Bennett, J. (2006) *History Matters. Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press) pp.14-15.

past'.²⁰ Examining the life of a woman who lived more than a hundred and fifty years ago involves a position of domination vis-à-vis her. Aware of the position from which I speak, I have tried to 'proceed with methodological caution and epistemic humility'.²¹

In this thesis I have worked on the assumption that the mediated nature of letters should make us cautious about unproblematic positivist methods of source authentication and interpretation that claim the comprehension of incontrovertible truth. Endorsing postmodern critiques of totalizing metanarratives, I conceive my historical account of Bodichon's *Bildung* as situated and partial – 'constructed as answers to particular questions phrased in specific ways about selected aspects of the past'.²² And I regard its outcome as inconclusive: my examination of Bodichon's *Bildung* is a subjective interpretation, 'personal, contingent (upon new knowledge)'.²³ At the same time, my historical account of Bodichon's *Bildung* contributes to the larger picture of historical knowledge. For history-writing may be a discursive practice. But historical accounts do shed new light on historical phenomena. Disparate information collected from different sources may not bring in the definitive history of an individual. But different sources of knowledge about Bodichon (though partial, perspectival and mediated) complicate and enhance our understanding of her. While acknowledging the never conclusive nature of historical inquiry, I retain the belief in the cumulative advance of historical knowledge. I present my research within an implicit claim for some degree of truth value rather than seeing history as a doomed project as some nihilist postmodern stances suggest. I address the question of my contribution to historical knowledge and I suggest avenues for further research in the last section of this thesis.

²⁰ Pierson, R.R. (1991) 'Experience, Difference, Dominance and Voice in the Writing of Canadian Women's History', in Offen, K., Pierson, R.R. and Rendall, J. (eds) *Writing Women's History. International Perspectives* (London: Macmillan) p.94.

²¹ Pierson, R.R. (1991) pp.93-94.

²² Fulbrook, M. (2002) *Historical Theory* (London and New York: Routledge) p.29.

²³ Brown, C.G. (2005) *Postmodernism for Historians* (Edinburgh: Pierson Longman) p.7.

8.3 Contribution and Further Research

Working with *Bildung* is not exempt from methodological difficulties. As noted in section 3.2., this educational term is not clearly defined because it was theorised by different thinkers during the German Enlightenment and its meaning evolved throughout the nineteenth century. Focusing on Wilhelm von Humboldt's theorization has only partially eased the task of working with such an elusive concept. He did not write a text or series of texts where he put forward his theory of *Bildung*. Rather, what we now understand as his conceptualization of *Bildung* is a reconstruction of ideas he expressed in unpublished essays and in personal correspondence that scholars have turned into a 'theory'. Neither his most relevant work, *Limits of State Action* (published in German in 1851, after his death)²⁴ nor his other essays (published posthumously by his brother) address the question of *Bildung* directly. In the twentieth century, some of his essays were translated and published by Marianne Cowan.²⁵ This anthology is a selection of fragments that Cowan considers representative of his thought, which ranges from liberal theory to linguistics. For its fragmented and mediated nature, working with (Humboldt's) *Bildung* has been a challenging endeavour. Besides his works, I have drawn on secondary literature in order to build a 'theory' of *Bildung* against which to examine Bodichon's personal correspondence.

Despite these difficulties, this thesis has taken up the challenge of exploring a more analytical and nuanced interpretation of Bodichon's 'achievements' by reading her personal correspondence through the lens of *Bildung* as a way of highlighting the limits of her feminist outlook. For, as noted in chapter 2, Bodichon has been the object of rich scholarly interest but the portrait that emerges from these works is a rather unproblematically positive assessment of her 'progressive' feminist thought and her leading role within the mid-Victorian women's movement. In turn, often employing the notion of narrative relationality, this epistolary study of Bodichon's self-cultivation has put into play the chain of letters that acted as forums where Bodichon (and her friends)

²⁴ *Limits of State Action* was published in English in 1854. Humboldt, W. von (1854) *The Sphere and Duties of Government* (translated from the German by Joseph Coulthard), In this thesis I have quoted from the translation and reprint by Burrow, J.W. (ed.) (1993) *The Limits of State Action* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund).

²⁵ Cowan, M. (ed.) (1963) *Humanist Without Portfolio: An Anthology of the Writings of Wilhelm von Humboldt* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press).

articulated her self-conception and circulated her self-image – the chain of letters that fuelled her self-development. This epistolary study of Bodichon has enabled me to argue for letters as sources of intersubjective self-cultivation. Indeed, by reading her personal correspondence following the *Bildung* thread I have explored letters as educational instruments. The examination of the significance of letters in Bodichon's self-formation suggests that, simultaneous to their communicative value, letters functioned as stimulating sources of personal development. As such, the apparently anodyne female practice of letter-writing turned out to be a rich source of agency. In this sense, my study sheds new light on the history of women's education via an exploration of informal and day-to-day female gestures as sources of self-development.

To date, the methodological framework I have used in this thesis has not been explored in Bodichon studies or in the history of women's education in Britain in the nineteenth century. While Hirsch briefly alludes to the role of letter-exchange in providing Bodichon with an informal source of learning in the context of her early education, by reading education in the sense of *Bildung*, in this thesis I have unpacked and expanded the significance of letter-exchange as a source of self-development during Bodichon's lifetime. Katharina Rowold unpacks how the notion of *Bildung* informed the feminist debates during the women's higher education campaign in Germany; and Laura Deiulio examines how epistolary friendship permitted two well read German women to challenge *Bildung's* implicit idea that the producers of cultural knowledge are men only. In this thesis I have shown how an English feminist subverted the masculinist underpinnings of *Bildung* by developing her intellectual persona, forging her identity as an artist, philanthropist and feminist, and working out her self-determination – in short, how she fashioned her individuality. Hence, my study of Bodichon's epistolary *Bildung* represents the first attempt to explore the significance of letters in her education as a way of providing a nuanced understanding of her feminism and as a way of suggesting alternative sources of education for literate women.

Within the scope of this thesis, I have not been able to address all the aspects that are raised by my examination of Bodichon's epistolary self-cultivation. Was the act of letter-writing gendered? I.e., did it differ from male ways of writing and exchanging letters? Did Bodichon's male counterparts exercise their self-cultivation to a greater extent or in a more advantageous way? Did men use letters in the same agentic manner as I have suggested Bodichon did

in her exercise of *Bildung*? How did Bodichon project an articulation of her self-cultivation in her paintings and publications? Did these act as sources of *Bildung* as I have suggested letters did? Do these other potential sources of *Bildung* interact? If so, how did this interaction affect the development of Bodichon's *Bildung*?

The *performative* reading of Bodichon's epistolary *Bildung* I have proposed in this thesis is offered as a way of re-viewing already studied historical figures. In this thesis I have suggested that Bodichon's female friends also went through a process of epistolary self-cultivation. With a vast *epistolarium* (held in Girton College), Bessie Parkes would be an historical figure that could be re-examined through her epistolary self-cultivation. She has not been the object of any biography but Bodichon studies and scholarship on the history of feminism in nineteenth-century England systematically refer to her feminist activities. A study of her epistolary *Bildung* would permit further assessing her feminist outlook and her significance for the mid-Victorian women's movement.

Likewise, in this thesis I have not been able to explore male forms of epistolary *Bildung*. There are letters written by men in Bodichon's *epistolarium*, especially those from Dr Norman Moore (the husband of Bodichon's niece, Amy Leigh Smith). Bringing out these other manuscript letters would illuminate to what extent female and male letter-writers articulated distinctly their epistolary self-cultivation. Contrasting epistolary narratives along gender lines would also shed light into gendered distinctions (if there are any) in the cultural practice of letter-exchange in mid-Victorian England.

My study of Bodichon's epistolary *Bildung* also aims to set the ground for further re-examinations of Bodichon. Her publications, paintings, engravings, journal illustrations and even personal artefacts – other means through which Bodichon forged her individuality – may well confirm her self-conception at the intersection of her feminist, philanthropic and feminist interests (and unveil further tensions). In chapter 7, I contrasted Bodichon's feminism in her letters and in her sketch 'Ye Newe Generation' to draw the attention to a nuanced aspect of her outlook: an inclusive understanding of her idea of women's professional identity that hides an exclusionary stance articulated in her letters. Further research could be directed towards the study of the parallel yet distinct ways in which Bodichon constituted her self in the visual and other textual supports, e.g. her paintings/sketches and her publications. Contrasting her textual and visual

self-formation would further problematise Bodichon's complex self. Exploring the interaction of these different sources of self-cultivation would throw light upon how each medium fuelled her *Bildung* as I suggested the letters she received nurtured her self-development and self-belief.

As I suggested in chapter 2, the 'truthfulness' of epistolary narratives cannot be easily claimed in referential terms; rather, these are a perspectival and subjective construction of 'reality'. It is possible to argue, however, that, overall, the philanthropic, feminist and artistic community embraced Bodichon's public image and that this was indicative of her achievements: she succeeded in exhibiting and selling her paintings, in founding the educational institutions she projected and in launching campaigns in favour of women's rights. Furthermore, as a sign of public recognition, she succeeded in publishing articles as an expert on travelling, art, and social matters, including on 'the woman question'. At the same time, reviews on her philanthropic/feminist achievements and her artistic productions were not unanimously complimentary. Her publications were the object of regular satire in *Saturday Review*. Commenting on *Women and Work* the *Saturday Review* once wrote: 'If this is a fair example of what a lady who boasts to have made the subject her own is likely to publish, we are afraid that the sex is really not so far developed as we had hoped'.²⁶ Likewise, in 1859 the literary and art journal *The Athenaeum* judged Bodichon's Algerian landscapes to be 'raw, rash and colourless'.²⁷ Bodichon could be further assessed via an exploration of the multidimensional nature of her identity. An in-depth examination of how others responded to her projected self-images – e.g. in newspaper reviews commenting on her artwork/social reform – would permit a further evaluation of the position Bodichon gained within her community and society more broadly.

As Cherry states, 'Disparate scraps of discontinuous information garnered from different sources' cannot bring in 'the definitive history of an individual' or constitute a unified subject.²⁸ Nonetheless, these other sources of knowledge (though equally partial, perspectival and mediated) would certainly complicate and enhance our understanding of Bodichon. A further nuanced portrait of

²⁶ [Anonymous] (1857) 'Bloomeriana', *Saturday Review*, 19 July, [unknown issue], [unknown page].

²⁷ [Unknown author], [untitled], *The Athenaeum*, 19 February 1859, quoted in Cherry, D. (2000) *Beyond the Frame: Feminism and Visual Culture, Britain 1850-1900* (London and New York: Routledge) p.95.

²⁸ Cherry, D. (1993) *Painting Women: Victorian Women Artists* (London and New York: Routledge) p.8.

Bodichon will contribute to problematizing a historical figure that has arguably tended to be portrayed unproblematically. Without putting into question her philanthropic and artistic achievements and her significance within the mid-Victorian women's movement, drawing attention to the limits of her feminist stance will contribute to destabilizing further unifying understandings of women's historical identity. Bringing first wave feminists' problematic standpoints into focus will tease out the extent to which feminism may be 'exercised' to the detriment of women from other backgrounds. Dismantling monolithic conceptualizations of womanhood in the past will contribute to informing feminist theory and feminist policy today. At a time of globalization and intense cross-cultural coexistence and in a context of enduring social hierarchies, feminism today faces the challenge of transnational and cross-class feminist encounters. As illustrated by this study through Bodichon's *epistolarium*, difference can be turned into an alterity that, irreducibly alien, is tamed and made intelligible to the middle-class, educated Western audience. Gaining awareness of the implications of this attitude is a timely reflection that will move feminists away from blanket judgements of 'backwardness' or 'inferiority' and facilitate cross-cultural/cross-class dialogues and coalitions among feminists.

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